Place, Space and Patriarchal Femininities in Selected Contemporary Novels by African Women Writers

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Abstract

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In much feminist literature, women's spaces are analysed as constructive and supportive sites that may offer respite from patriarchy. However, women's spaces are not inherently emancipatory. Through the socio-spatial dispersal of patriarchal power, places and spaces varying in scale – nations, cities, rural towns, private-public places and the home – can construct women who further the interests of men. Specifically, homosocial spaces, spaces where women interact with other women, can produce femininities that oppress other women by actively advancing patriarchal concerns. The selected primary texts consider spaces in regionally diverse but socially similar African contexts: Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2011) and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) are set in Nigeria, Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1998) is set in Egypt, while Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2010) is set in both Egypt and Sudan. I use the selected novels as cartographies for socio-geographical inquiry to establish how space and place construct patriarchal women. Literary spaces and places are studied from largest to smallest scale: The analysis of national spaces in the novels is followed by a study of urban and rural spaces, followed by private-public places, domestic place and, finally, at a micro-scale, the body-as-place. The analyses of these literary spaces will reveal the mechanisms by which patriarchal women are spatially produced, and may use space to oppress other women.
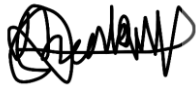
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Declaration

I declare that *Place, Space and Patriarchal Femininities in Selected Contemporary Novels by African Women Writers* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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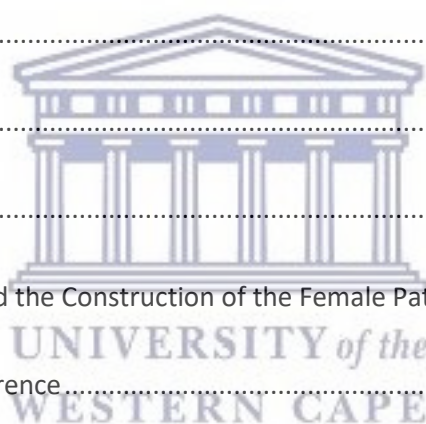
Yours faithfully

(Ass. Prof. F.F. Moolla: Supervisor)

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Introduction: Locating the Female Patriarch

It would all soon be over, right there under the deep water that ran below

Carter Bridge. Then she would be able to seek out and meet her chi, *her personal*

god, and she would ask her why she had punished her so. She knew her chi *was a*

woman, not just because to her way of thinking only a woman would be so thorough

in punishing another.

– Nnu Ego, *The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta 9)

The image of the women's space as a haven of support, sisterhood and resistance to patriarchy, makes a frequent appearance in works of fiction as well as feminist criticism. Although this conception of women's spaces is not unfounded – indeed, I discuss some valid examples thereof later – it remains misleading. Even the most insulated and safeguarded space may be susceptible to the larger patriarchal context within which it is located. Furthermore, just as all feminists need not be women, patriarchal behaviour is not exclusively observed in those of male gender or sex but, in particular contexts, can also be perpetrated by women. Through my analyses of four novels by African women writers, I hope to demonstrate that women's spaces are not inherently resistant to patriarchy, but can produce patriarchal women that oppress other women. The same woman can be a victim of patriarchal exploitation and also use patriarchal systems of power to her own advantage. Patriarchal women are produced by patriarchal spaces, and may even use space to facilitate their oppression of other women. Through examining the national, urban, rural and small spaces in Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1998)*, Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2011), Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) and Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2010), I analyse how these texts reveal the spatial production of patriarchal femininity, as well as the ways

patriarchal women use space to oppress other women. As the character Nnu Ego reasons in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood,* women can be exceedingly "thorough" in causing one another hardship.

The Emergence of Space through Time

Through a shared parentage in storytelling, literature and history carry traces of each other. As Hayden White observes in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, history is a story, and stories trace histories in narrative time. Such is the importance of time and linearity in literature that our study of literature is typically divided into periods – Medieval, Renaissance, Romantic, Enlightenment, Modernist, and Postmodernist. In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad's well-known modernist novella set in the colonial Congo, Marlow's journey into the interior of Africa has him "travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (48) to a "prehistoric earth" (51). In the Anglo-American tradition, modernity is inextricably bound with progress and futurity, whereas societies regarded as traditional or conservative are associated with the past. Marlow's journey into Africa thus sends him into an incongruous, extra-historic time-space, or "chronotope" to use the term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher of the novel, in *The Dialogic Imagination.* In Anglo-American literature, the chronological plot is rooted in classical tragedy, in which the events that befall the hero are matters of cause and effect. The Romantic poets, too, were concerned with the passing of time and its impact on human experience, whereas the ghosts and memories of recent wars permeate Modernist texts. The plot or narrative as a chronologically oriented construct is so pervasive that its presence is effaced through naturalisation in most realist literature. By contrast, time is foregrounded and disrupted in the temporally distortive or achronological plots of Modernism and Postmodernism. In literary criticism, chronology and temporality are examined in narratology

and narrative study, pioneered by scholars such as Paul Ricoeur, where narrative is equated with literary time. Studies of memory, historical fiction and biography are all founded on a tradition that equates narrative with the human lifetime.

While literary scholarship has predominantly engaged with temporality, my particular focus in this thesis is on the spatial, although time and space remain inescapably interrelated concepts. Temporal and periodised studies are generally more linear than spatial studies, yet linearity remains but a spatial metaphor for time. This time-space confluence is addressed in various guises by both literary criticism and geography. Bakhtin, referred to above, defines the concept of the chronotope in *The Dialogic Imagination* to characterise narrative time-space in different literary forms, as a type of "living artistic perception" that does not allow for the separation of time and space (84). Humanist geographers have developed similarly integrated understandings of time and space, most notably Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness,* and Doreen Massey in *Space, Place and Gender*. More recently, in *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form*, David Alworth characterises the phenomenon of the inextricability of time and space as the accumulation of time within space (101). Key scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson and David Harvey have further argued that this experience of time-space collapse is exacerbated in the context of late capitalism. Information and travel technologies have increased the rate and speed at which ideas move and have given rise to the study of simultaneity. This instantaneous global flow of ideas and capital is central to the production of patriarchal women in *Swallow,* for example, as they long to access the image of the Global North that reaches them in Nigeria. Due to the inextricable interconnectedness of time and space, the spatial focus of this thesis will not lose sight of the temporal settings of the texts.

With the development of interdisciplinary studies of geography and literature, space has begun to enjoy more focussed engagement. An important text that aided in formalising approaches to studying space in literature is Carl Darryl Malmgren's *Fictional Space in the Modernist and Post-modernist American Novel.* Building on the work of French authors and theorists Michel Butor and Gérard Genette, Malmgren argues that a text has three spatial dimensions. The "material space" or "space of textuality" is the space that the physical text utilises as an object with, perhaps, a number of pages and words with assigned places (25). The text also occupies an "imaginal space projected by the unfolding fictional world" (26), such as the city of Lagos, as presented, for example, in the Nigeria of *Swallow*. This is similar to what Edward Soja terms the "real-and-imagined" space in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. In the process of decoding the text, the reader will "actualize" this space (26). Lastly, the text also signifies the "extratextual" world, and relies heavily on the reader to interpret this reference (26). Malmgren also characterises realist fictional space as a "process" imposed upon its real counterpart and acknowledges the roles of both the author and the reader in building this fictional space (28-29). Space projected by fiction is not mimetic, but is encoded with epistemological and ontological assumptions, usually constructed by the geo-cultural context of text and author[1] as well as the reader's own frame of reference. I therefore engage the sociohistorical contexts of the

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[1] It should be noted that the author can assume and write from within a different geo-cultural context than their own. In this case, they will likely produce a work shaped by both their own world as well as their projected fictional world.

extratextual nations and cities represented in the texts I analyse, as they impact the

construction of the reader's "imaginal space".

In much literary scholarship, the notion of "setting" has long dislodged an

engagement with the constructive materiality of space. As "setting", space has been little

more than passive context for a temporal narrative. Malmgren's delineation of the

complexities of literary space and the human geographers' foregrounding of social and

epistemological questions in spatial study have allowed approaches to literary space to evolve

into the study of an active component the construction of narrative. Robert Tally summarises

this change from literary space as setting to an active narrative element: "By determining the

elements of a story or map, by choosing which elements will be prominent and which can

remain in the background, and by arranging the elements in a way best suited to the intended

effects that writer or cartographer wishes the work to have upon reader, the author is also

determining what *kind* of narrative or map this will be" (55). Tally's conception of the link

between the novel's spatiality and the particular kind of narrative constructed from the

author's map allows him to present "genre itself as a sort of map", as genre also constructs

the "world" of the story (55). Tally also identifies two other approaches to studying space in

literature: literary cartography, pioneered by Erich Auerbach, and literary geography, which

he defines himself. Literary cartography either presents a complete, defined world within the

narrative, or it creates a more mystical or "otherworldly" experience that ignores specificities

and prioritises thought and feeling (61). Literary geography, on the other hand, "implies a

form of reading that focuses attention on spaces and spatiality in the texts under

consideration" and involves "paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical

formations that affect literary and cultural productions" (80). For example, Franco Moretti

developed an "atlas" of the European novel, in a study with the same title, to offer a

cartographic view of literary production. Moretti also looks at the spatial and economic

dissemination of different kinds of literature on a global and local scale. Although my study can loosely be considered a work of literary geography in Tally's sense, I do narrow my focus to exclude the spaces of production of the studied texts, as this allows me to engage with the other spatial aspects in more depth.

Mapping Space and Feminism

Given the focus on feminism in this thesis, one needs to be cognisant of how spatiality has informed feminism seemingly since feminism's first articulation in literature. In various fields, spatial studies intersect with the production and maintenance of power. For example, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau typifies place as foundationally shaped by social, economic and political systems, and in *Place, Modernity, and the Consumer's World: A Relational Framework for Geographical Analysis*, Robert Sack studies how the negotiation of place can manifest as an economic process. The study of patriarchy and its production through and by space therefore naturally emerges as a similar line of inquiry. Shirley Ardener's 1981 work *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* was a pioneering study in the field of feminist geography, and opened the way for subsequent texts such as Daphne Spain's *Gendered Spaces* to further question gendered divisions of space. Essential to understanding how the social shapes space is leading feminist geographer Gillian Rose's 1993 study *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, followed shortly after by Doreen Massey's equally important *Space, Place and Gender.* Both texts illuminate the inherent patriarchal discourses underlying much geographical work, and have inspired new ways of thinking about the impact of space on gender relations. Nancy Duncan further establishes the link between the body, space and gender in her edited volume *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality.* These feminist geographers

and critical theorists created a paradigm that inspired the study of women's spaces in literature in order to glean insights about their representation in culture.

The study of space and gender developed following a similar trajectory in the world of literary criticism. One of the seminal texts that established the link between place, gender and cultural production is Virginia Woolf's 1928 essay *A Room of One's Own*, which analyses the impact of women's general lack of privacy and resources – here manifested spatially as a private sitting room – on their ability to produce culture. A more recent but equally important text is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which explores how social difference is established in the domestic places of Victorian literature. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* and Susan Andrade's *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988* both served to introduce a multiscalar approach to studying textual spaces and places set in postcolonial contexts. As will become apparent in the study of domestic space in Chapter 4, the ambiguity of small space is already evident in the contrast between Gilbert and Gubar's study of domestic space as carceral and Woolf's use of a private room as allegorical of socioeconomic and creative freedom. Due to this capacity of space to produce and manifest power, the study of texts set in postcolonial Africa, as we shall see, is intimately bound to the study of space.

Postcolonial Space

As postcolonial concerns emphasise continental and national space, scholarship concerning big spaces such as continents, transnational regions, nations and cities pervades the study of African literary space. A spatial focus is key for a study of African texts as they are often denoted by their geographical origins, for example, West African or South African

literatures. Although the variation within African literature is obviously immense, the continent nevertheless constructs its own ontological paradigm. In *Africa's Narrative Geographies: Charting the Intersections of Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies,* Dustin Crowley notes how spatial concerns shape African literature:

> The central questions of African literary study have fundamentally geographic components, beginning with a history of colonialism and imperialism that were themselves thoroughly geographic endeavors – establishing cities and ports to facilitate global flows of people and resources, undoing extant geographies of identity and relation, and replacing them with new colonies and territories. These colonies, of course, would largely become the outlines of new nation-states, the borders and contents of which have provided endless fodder for concerns over national and ethnic identity, as well as debates about (typically) differential development of urban and rural spaces in order to expedite the exploitation and exportation of resources for foreign markets, and so on. (2)
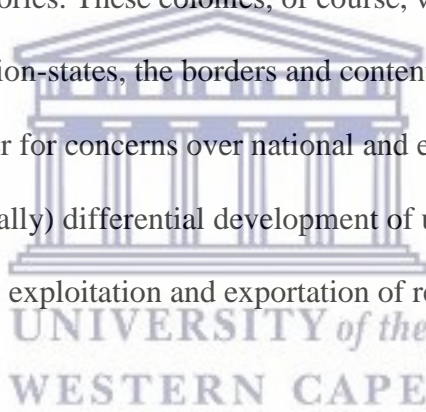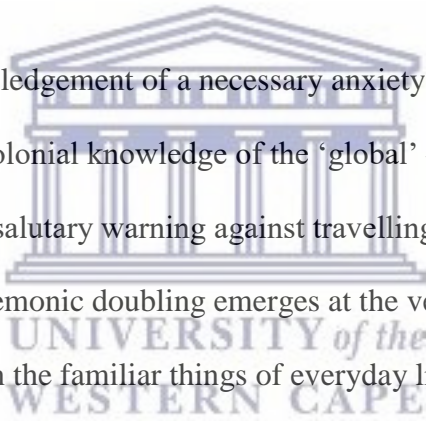
African literatures such as the texts studied in this thesis are constructed, imaginatively speaking, on African soil; they are infused with African sets of ideas, narratives, institutions and histories that intersect within the space of their creation. The global dynamics between Africa and African literature, and the Global North and Anglo-American literary scholarship, are mapped in the chapter to follow. To demonstrate how novels – and African literature in particular – are "obsessed with mapping" (190), Elliot Colla unpacks the spatial elements of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. As mentioned earlier, in much literary scholarship, Marlow's journey down the river is read as a metaphor for going back in time. However, as Colla points out, Conrad's novels can also be regarded as maps, in that

they "orient the readers with regard to British imperialism as an arrangement of concrete contexts and abstract connections, particular settings and global networks" (190). Conrad therefore constructs the British Empire as "grids, plots and scales of space" (190-191). This has created a spatial foundation which many African literary works have engaged: "A later generation of African authors – from Chinua Achebe to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to Tayeb Salih – certainly recognized that Conrad was the master cultural mapmaker of the imperial period, and went on to contest and rewrite the coordinates of Conrad's fictions to other ends, turning some of them upside down in the process" (Colla 191). Conrad's imperial approach to mapping is evident in his descriptions of Africa as empty space. In his topography of the continent, it is devoid of meaning, specificity, identity and even what he would define as human inhabitants. What Colla alludes to is elaborated in Emad Mirmotahari's study of Abdulrazak Gurnah's work, in which Mirmotahari argues that Conrad's imperial map of Africa "aided in the creation of a map for a future African literature that foregrounds the 'where' of Africa" (46), examples of which include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* Gurnah's *Paradise,* Nuruddin Farah's *Maps,* and the many other spatially-centred texts mentioned in this thesis. For Conrad, Africa was unknown to Europeans, and therefore empty, when in reality its specificity and order are known to those whose knowledge has historically been denied relevance.

In *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that, despite the complexity of mutual influence between the Global South and the Global North, epistemological power and capital still accumulate in the Global North. The spaces in these texts are thus produced both by their respective geo-cultural contexts as well as the dominant influence of Anglo-American power structures. Kwaku Gyasi argues that the form of African literature is a testament to the epistemological hold that the Global North has over Africa. Although African literatures stem from African oral traditions, the "form and

style" of African literature remains modelled on European convention (394). For Gyasi, the African novel is therefore "a hybrid product that draws on African oral traditions and literature and yet is clothed in imported literary traditions" (394). Homi Bhabha also interrogates the relationship between African literature and Anglo-American critical theory – the "global link between colony and metropolis" – to determine whether the site of writing has an impact on the validity of the reading. His argument initially centres on the fact that the postcolonial site – just like the colonial site – can only be labelled as such from the perspective of its opposite, the metropolitan site. "Reason" requires the "unreasonable" to exist, therefore a reading conducted from the metropolitan site will produce a prejudiced reading of the postcolonial:

> Is this acknowledgement of a necessary anxiety in constructing a transformative, postcolonial knowledge of the 'global' – *at the metropolitan site* – a salutary warning against travelling theory? […] When this discourse of a daemonic doubling emerges at the very centre of metropolitan life, then the familiar things of everyday life and letters are marked by an irresistible sense of their genealogical difference, a 'postcolonial provenance.' (Bhabha, *Location* 213)

Bhabha's question is important to those conducting readings of texts situated outside of the "metropolis". It is still unclear whether it is possible and appropriate for a Eurocentric critical tradition to understand and read the global when it is has an inherent structural bias, and therefore is not likely to escape itself. Although I am not located in what is considered the Western metropolitan site, I am writing from within the Anglo-American scholarly tradition. While I cannot erase this, I shall examine some ways in which an awareness of this position can aid in mitigating its effects on my reading. The relationship between African

literature and Anglo-American scholarship will be discussed in more depth in the first chapter through engagement with the work of Augustine Asaah, Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha, Elleke Boehmer, Harry Garuba, Simon Gikandi, Frederic Jameson, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.

It is clear from the above arguments that a study of African literature requires some form of acknowledgement of the larger world context, whether that is to trace the impact of colonial forces, or to map the current rapid expansion of global capitalist modernity. In the first chapter, I examine how such global influences contribute to producing patriarchal women characters in *Swallow* and *Lyrics Alley.* In *The Modern World-System,* Immanuel Wallerstein examines these global intersections as a spatial network of economic, political and cultural power (349). He maps the West as the centre of these powers and demonstrates how Africa and other postcolonial states are relegated to the periphery. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* Arjun Appadurai categorises these flows of power according to five dimensions: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes (33). As spaces construct different socio-political, economic and cultural systems of meaning, this gives rise to a complex network of disjunctures. In the first chapter, the work of both Wallerstein and Appadurai are crucial to the discussion of the Global North as a vision of a better life, which contributes to the spatial construction of the patriarchal women in the novels by Leila Aboulela and Sefi Atta.

Global systems of power play an essential role in postcolonial studies of African literary space, which has received attention from various literary scholars. Postcolonial studies of African "big" space include works on pan-African and national literatures, as well as migrant, transnational and diasporic identities. Key scholars of this field that will be alluded to in this thesis include Elleke Boehmer, Edward Colla, Harry Garuba, Simon

Gikandi, Achille Mbembe and Grace Musila. Postcolonial cities developed as a subject of study in humanist geography in the work of scholars such as Tim Cresswell, Bill Freund, Garth Myers, Ranka Primorac, Jennifer Robinson and Abdoumaliq Simone. Literary geographers and theorists such as Dustin Crowley, Harry Garuba, Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall study urban postcolonial literatures such as Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*, and Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys.* While big space has enjoyed a fair amount of attention in postcolonial African literary scholarship, representations of smaller spaces, however, such as the home, the compound, the market, the bus station, the hospital and the hair salon, are relatively unexplored in studies of African literature. Most notably, authors Gabeba Baderoon, Achille Mbembe, Grace Musila, and Christopher Okonkwo have made important strides in reading the African literary canon's representations of domestic space. They offer different theoretical avenues to a central, recurring theme: the spatial construction of oppression and resistance in the home. The source of this power imbalance is typically a patriarchal national government, at times represented within the home by a patriarch.

Space and Place

Although the terms "space" and "place" are interchangeable in many contexts, a spatial study requires that the intuitive difference between these concepts be formalised. In *Place: A Short Introduction*, cultural geographer Tim Cresswell defines space as abstract, and place as concrete: "When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them" (8). Many other literary geographers, including Colla, Crowley and Tally, share this perspective. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Tuan provides a similar definition that contrasts space as "open" and place as "enclosed" (54). Whereas space "suggests future and invites action", it

also lacks "established meaning" and renders the person vulnerable (54). Place, on the other hand, is "humanized" and provides a "calm center of established values" (54). To unpack these differences between space and place, Cresswell draws on the work of political geographer John Agnew to discuss the three elements that a "place" comprises: location, locale and "sense of place" (7). Location refers to the "where" of a place, usually determined by a set of coordinates on a map or its physical distance from other places. Although Cresswell agrees with Agnew on this, he points out that this does not mean that places are necessarily stationary, as ships, for example, could also be considered places (7). The "locale" is the form of a place and its relation to the bodies within, which in turn "produce and consume meaning" (7). The "sense of place" refers to the sentimental component of place – the emotions and memories that people associate with the place (7), such as the Egyptian character in *Lyrics Alley's* associations of Cairo with freedom and modernity. In this third, abstract aspect of place, it is clear that place and space are not mutually exclusive concepts, but interdependent ones. Place and space respectively contain both abstract and concrete components.
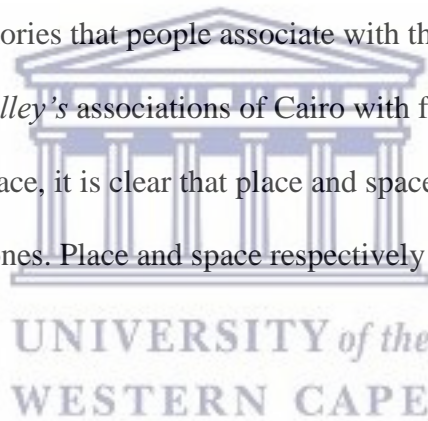
Space not only accommodates elements of the concrete but can be transformed into place when a society inscribes it with meaning, using what Cresswell calls "place-making activities" (7). These span physical activities such as agriculture or building, as well as abstract processes such as naming a place or purchasing it. Yard maintenance, traffic legislation, decorating, travelling, visiting, and even the creation and celebration of nationhood in monuments, statues, flags, money and postage stamps all contribute to the construction and reconstruction of places. To return to the example of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mirmotahari compares Conrad's description of African space to the spaces presented in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise:*

Conrad's literary engagement with imperial space has therefore aided

in the creation of a map for a future African literature that foregrounds the

"where" of Africa. Names are important by any measure, and the ability to

name, to name first, is to exercise formidable power. The physical spaces in

which the Africans reside are named and claimed. Because *Heart of Darkness*

begins its narrative of Africa by denying it spatial specificity and names,

Things Fall Apart begins by presenting names and very specific geographies.

"Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond."

[…] *Paradise*, like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, begins with a proper name,

Yusuf, and the rest of the narrative teems with named places in eastern Africa

– Tayari, Zanzibar (in Kiswahili it is known as Unguja), Kawa, and beyond, to

Muscat, Egypt, and Punjab. Not only did the eastern African coast have a map

before it was charted by all of Europe's Marlows, it had a cultural map that

extended beyond the African landmass. Africa may have been unknown to

Europeans, but it knew, and was known to, others. (46)

This process of place-making through naming again suggests that abstract space and

concrete place are thesis and antithesis – they each contain the potential to become the other.

This sentiment is shared by seminal French philosopher of space Henri Lefebvre, who

devotes a chapter titled "Absolute Place and Abstract Space" to the matter in his 1974 work

The Production of Space. In support of viewing space and place as interrelated concepts,

Cresswell iterates Arturo Escobar's argument in "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on

Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localisation" that, although the relationships between

people and places are particular and situated, they also participate in universal concepts and

means of interaction with space.

Long a point of interest in geography, science and philosophy, place was formalised as an object of theoretical inquiry in the field of human geography in the latter twentieth century (Cresswell 15). With the development of linear perspective in the Renaissance, the viewer was positioned at "a particular point in space" that constructed the sole, individual locus of meaning (Tally 18-19). This, in turn, formed the foundation of Cartesian and early modern conceptions of space and place. As mentioned earlier, Tuan and Relph are generally considered to be the pioneers of human geography. Heavily influenced by phenomenology, they developed conceptions of place in which place and human perception mutually constitute each other. In his seminal 1960 text *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Edmund Husserl argues that human consciousness is intentional; and it only exists in relation to other objects or ideas. Thus, we cannot be conscious without being conscious of something in particular. The world outside of ourselves, whether abstract or concrete, shapes our thoughts and experiences (27-31). However, we also cannot access anything independently of our mental constructs. As Cresswell notes (23), the language of Husserl is evident in Relph's description of place as that which determines our experience of the world: "The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences … The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence" (Relph 43). In their adoption of phenomenology, some human geographers developed either idealist or materialist approaches to the relationship between place and the social. The idealist approach, which defines place as socially produced, was crystallised in Tuan's *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Tuan conceptualises "topophilia" as the social construction of places, in which meaningless or empty material environments are imbued with meaning and attachment (93). Tuan's assertion is mirrored in the work of

Marxist critical social theorists such as Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre also privileges the social in the production of "social spaces", which are similar to what human geography calls "places". These approaches were countered almost immediately by more materialist approaches to place. In his 1980 paper "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets", David Seamon describes the construction and negotiation of space as a matter of habit and the body's choreography; it is a "pre-conscious process" (153), and therefore more physical than mental or social. In his 1987 paper *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Edward Casey conceptualises place not only as the site of memory, but the key mechanism of its production (186-107). Cresswell interprets this moment as the transition from place being regarded as a static, particular fact, to being considered an event or process of perpetual becoming (*Place* 40). This contributed to the evolution of spatial study into the study of a dialectic between space and the social.

For Cresswell, theorising place and the social as a dialectic is humanist geography's most important achievement. He argues that "[p]laces are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either (*In Place* 13). In *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Jeff Malpas also argues that place is as necessary for the production of the social as the social is for the production of place, for where else can the social be expressed? Place is now understood as an open, active locus that shapes human life, rather than simply being shaped by it. Edward Soja echoes this view in his conception of the "socio-spatial dialectic" in his 1980 paper by that title. In *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form*, David Alworth leans on the work of Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour and Erving Goffman to map how "sites", as enumerated below, construct the social. Alworth uses this dynamic to examine how literary representations of asylums, supermarkets, dumps, roads and ruins produce our understanding of social life. Despite having a materialist or constructivist bent, Alworth does consider sites
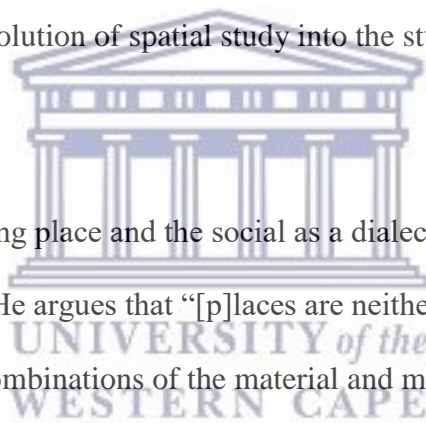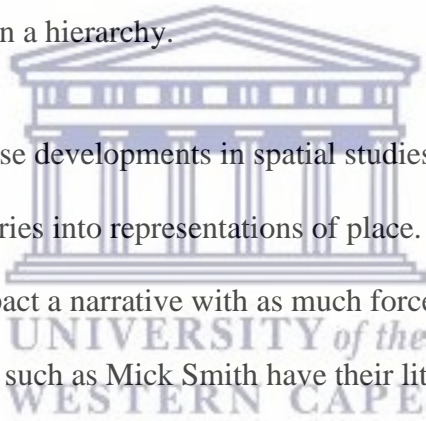
to be both "determinants of sociality" and "constellations of cultural artefacts" (20).

Important spatial analyses of social life with similar socio-spatial approaches can be found in

the work of Neil Smith, David Harvey and Robert Sack. I shall track the mutual implication

of space and human subjectivity, particularly in Chapter 4 of the thesis, in which I examine

the ways the structure of a household impacts the subjectivity of its inhabitants, and how the

people living in the household likewise change its shape.

Another useful articulation of the relationship between space and place is the concept

of scale. Scale is commonly understood in its technical capacity as the size of a space or place

in relation to other spaces or places. It plays a crucial role in revealing the universal aspects

of the synergy between the spatial and the social. Scale first emerged as a point of theoretical

inquiry in Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* and has also featured in the work of

Lefebvre. Crowley considers scale a rich point of departure by virtue of its relational quality,

as it reveals the "layers and linkages of external forces at work in generating even the most

local conditions" (24). Geographer Andrew Herod studies scale at length in his study titled

Scale, in which he notes that the most prolific examinations of scale are studies of the

dialectic between the global and the local (2). This phenomenon emerges in the discussions

of Nigeria and Sudan in a global context in the first chapter, with regard to the impact of this

dialectic on the production of patriarchal femininities. Herod also traces the extensive debate

regarding the ontological status of scale – whether it is a mental or social construct, or a

material occurrence that can be empirically observed. From this debate, relative consensus

emerges regarding the key characteristics of scales. Scale is socially constructed or

produced[2]; it forms geographical boundaries around spaces, it is fluid, and there is movement of actors and ideas between scales (22). Herod's discussion of scalar interactions with the body will form a key part of the final chapter in this study, where the body acts as a microcosm of domestic space that the female patriarch uses to oppress the other women in the home. The penetration of national patriarchy into cities is also examined through the concept of scale in the second chapter. Scale further functions as a tool in conceptualising ethical theoretical frameworks. In "The Scale of World Literature", Nirvana Tanoukhi emphasises the importance of scale in this regard, as it facilitates an "ethics of comparison" (604), which precludes the need to prescribe or impose a particular epistemological or perspectival framework. Entities – in this case particular places – can be read alongside one another, rather than from within a hierarchy.

Simply, inspired by these developments in spatial studies, literary scholars began to conduct interdisciplinary inquiries into representations of place. Stories have to happen somewhere, and space can impact a narrative with as much force as an event. Environmentalist philosophers such as Mick Smith have their literary counterparts in ecocritics like Robert Nixon and Robert Watson, who place particular emphasis on the transformation of the environment in works such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide,* Helon Habila's *Oil on Water,* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road.* Transnational flows of people – what Appadurai calls the "ethnoscape" – gave rise to the study of migrancy, hybridity, displacement, alienation, and diasporic and transnational identities in the work of such

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[2] Preference of the verb "constructed" over "produced" depends on whether the particular theorist believes scale to be an abstract or material concept.

diverse authors as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Xiaolu Guo, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Khaled Hosseini, Bharati Mukherjee, Jean Rhys, Henry Roth, Subjeev Sahota and Art Spiegelman. In these works, places feature as the loci of identity, home and belonging or, by contrast, alienation and isolation. Processes of place-making in urban studies have also drawn attention, particularly in Modernist studies. Essential advances in this area include Charles Baudelaire's modernist figure of the *flâneur*, who through city mobility turns space into place, developed further in the work of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau. Urban place-making has also been the focus of the sociology of George Simmel and, more recently, the philosophy of Marshall Berman, which sometimes enters literary analysis of space and place. As discussed in the second chapter, *The Country and the City* by Raymond Williams is particularly useful in mapping the differences between literatures of the city and literatures of the rural. As the novels selected for this study foreground urban over rural space, the former will receive the most attention. In the study of smaller spaces, the fiction and essays of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the earlier-mentioned work of Virginia Woolf contributed significantly to the development of spatial studies in feminist literary criticism. More recent works in this area include the study of gendered and class-bound places in Victorian literary households in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* and Susan Andrade's study of domestic feminisms in the works of African women writers in *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms.*

In the development of urban studies as well as the explosion of migrant and diasporic studies, the study of mobility has become all the more relevant to analyses of literary space. Tuan defines space as the territory of movement, whereas place is a locus of pause, adding that pause creates place (*Space and Place* 6). In the third chapter, African forms of mobility are examined with reference to the work of Colla and Crowley, against the more general backdrop of Bertrand Westphal's engagement with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's

conception of smooth and striated space. While smooth space allows freedom of movement, striated space is fraught with obstacles of enclosure, hierarchy and authority. Mobility in this context allows for the deconstruction of borders and offers a mechanism of resistance. Mobility thus offers dual imagery in textual representations: it is equated with freedom, but also with emptiness, vulnerability and loneliness. As the second chapter will show, whereas the former representation of mobility is central to *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the latter emerges as a key theme in *The Tent.* The representation of mobility as freedom and positive resistance is largely present in, and perhaps a result of, its association with ideas of progress in modernity. Cresswell notes that mobility as "liberty" and "progress" is one of the "foundational narratives of modernity" (*"Politics of Mobility"* 162). For example, in *Swallow,* women's access to public transport allows them to travel from their home at the periphery of the city to the centre, where they can work to earn a living. Alexandra Ganser points out in *Roads of Her Own* that the association of travel with economic or political necessity is usually associated with women characters, whereas men are generally represented as travelling for "wanderlust or adventurousness" (34). This is captured in the Modernist figure of the *flâneur*, discussed earlier, functioning as a symbol of urban mobility. This spatial liberty is also associated with the power that comes from knowing the city. As Kevin Lynch explains in *The Image of the City*, it is through the experience of a city's visual markers that its inhabitants can construct a cognitive map of it and thereby render legible an otherwise opaque chaos (4). However, as is suggested by the analyses in this study, women characters can have great trouble accessing transport, and their lived experience of it is fraught due to the fact that transport remains a patriarchal and masculine system in which they do not feel safe. That mobility and transport are not inherently liberating becomes clear in Crowley's discussion of Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, where negotiating urban space "often involves more struggle and a sense of dislocation in the

shifting, disruptive spaces of the global city" (Crowley 136). This is also applicable on an intra-city scale, such as when the protagonist moved to her rapist's home against her will in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. In such cases, mobility is something unfortunate that is inflicted upon a victim.

As is clear from the works of feminist geographers and literary theorists, places can – like mobilities – alienate, endanger and oppress women. In much feminist literature, networks of women are presented as constructive and supportive. However, when considered through a spatial lens, the literary spaces in the novels under discussion represent homosocial contexts that, unexpectedly, produce patriarchal women. Through the socio-spatial distribution of power, spaces and places, varying in scale, shape patriarchal women who render places unhomely to other women. These oppressive activities can be characterised as homosocial, since they are interactions between women of a non-sexual nature. Although homosociality remains a term primarily used in sociological fields, theorists such as Meredith Goldsmith and Katharine Binhammer have taken significant strides in applying the concept to literary analysis. However, there has been little work done on homosocial interactions constituted by specific spaces, and virtually none that applies to texts of African origin. In this thesis I examine how homosocial places and spaces create physical contexts that encourage the proclivities of patriarchal women to oppress other women. As the social is produced by space to the same extent that space shapes the social, I also consider how patriarchal women characters use homosocial space as a tool to control or police other women. To contextualise the literary spaces under discussion, I shall summarise the relevant existing scholarship on each of the primary texts.

Geo-textual Contexts

The texts selected for this study are Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2010), Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent,* translated by Anthony Calderbank (1998), Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2011), and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). Although there are myriad texts that would have served in a multiscalar spatial study, such as the work of Chris Abani, Teju Cole, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nuruddin Farah and Chibundu Onuzo to name a few, the chosen texts meet specific criteria. Firstly, they have been chosen for the intensity of their focus on spaces and places varying in scale. Big space unfolds at the transnational and national level. For example, the spectre of the Global North beckons as an escape from poverty for the Nigerian characters in *Swallow,* and the regional politics surrounding Egypt and Sudan infiltrate even the smallest of places in *Lyrics Alley.* City life manifests as a focus on characters' mobility and the urban entropy they negotiate, whereas the rural is represented to a lesser extent in their small towns of origin. Smaller places are traced in detail, providing insight into the hospital, hair salon, market, home and the body-as-home. The texts have also been chosen for the intracontinental and regional differentiation they highlight. *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* are set in Nigeria, *The Tent* is set in Egypt, and *Lyrics Alley* is set in both Egypt and the Sudan. This allows for a focused but varied scope of inter- and intra-cultural variation, as well as urban and, to a lesser extent, rural femininities, which are indispensable in the context of a study on space. However, these spaces remain situated within the African "northern hemisphere" within relative proximity to one another, so that the same general regional characteristics may be contextualised. For example, if an East African text were to be included, the legacy and continuing influences of Indian Ocean trade would require additional and thorough charting. These novels also foreground female homosocial relationships, as they all feature female protagonists, and the action converges upon their relationships with other women. Although male characters are present, they play secondary

roles within the narratives. To revert, in closing, to a temporal perspective, these novels are all also sufficiently recent to enable me to study works produced in similar historical contexts.

The novels selected delineate space in fascinating ways across a wide swathe of the African continent. In "Speaking as a Woman", Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo demonstrates the gendered intersections between transnational space and small spaces such as the body: "for the West African Moslem woman, the veil is no more than a couple of meters of an often pretty gossamer fabric. This she normally and winsomely drapes over the back of her head and her shoulders" (380). Aidoo demonstrates that the larger spatial context in which the veil is worn can determine its meaning; in many West-African contexts, the purpose of the veil is not to shield, protect or hide women, but "to make its wearers look more attractive and decidedly unhidden" (380). The texts chosen for this study allow for similar comparisons of geo-culturally produced femininities between large and small spaces in different African national contexts. As discussed, the texts are set along a wide horizontal band spanning much of the width of the North African region, and within a similarly varied but close time range. We move from the agricultural villages on the fertile plains of the Eastern Nile Delta in *The Tent*, to the bustling city of Cairo in *Lyrics Alley.* We then follow the Nile River all the way into its branches and reincarnations in the Sudan, to arrive at the city of Umdurman[3] where the greater part of the action of *Lyrics Alley* takes shape. We then skip across Chad in a fairly straight but slightly south-bound trajectory to the west, to land

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[3] I explain my use of this spelling, rather than the more common "Omdurman", in the first chapter.

again in the Nigerian city of Ibadan, where the Alao home is located in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* Then we make a final trip southwest to the Nigerian coast, to watch Tolani and Rose navigate and negotiate the bustling megalopolis that is Lagos.

The Tent is set in the Eastern Nile Delta in Egypt. Contrary to the expectations created by the novel's title – which evokes a sense of freedom and adventure – and its desert country setting, the narrative is charged with claustrophobic anxiety. The protagonist is a young girl named Fatima, who grows up confined to her family home. In the translator's introduction to the text, Anthony Calderbank clarifies that contact with the "peasant villages" of the Nile Delta has resulted in the gradual settling of Bedouin families (1). In her survey of Bedouin cultures, *The Bedouin*, Shelagh Weir notes that widespread settling is largely driven by economic and political changes (11). Therefore, although Fatima and her family are Bedouin in culture, they live in a built house on the outskirts of an agricultural village. The Bedouin women are secluded to protect their modesty – they are not to be exposed to the villagers. Fatima therefore watches from the tops of trees while her father, paternal grandmother and servants move freely beyond the boundaries of the property. Her mother and three older sisters, Safiya, Fouz and Rihana, suffer the same fate. Her mother spends her days crying in a darkened room after birthing four daughters and suffering the miscarriage of her three sons. Also living in the house – sleeping in the hallways and living areas – are the slaves and servants, among whom are Fatima's beloved servant Sardoub and Sardoub's niece, Sasa. Inspired by the folk tales Sardoub tells her, Fatima constructs an imaginary, mythical desert world within which she can move freely. The characters that populate this world, Sigeema, Musallam and Zahwa, are Fatima's confidants. However, as Fatima's captivity continues to weigh on her, the division between the real and imaginary begins to fade. Her sisters leave the home to be married, her mother dies after another miscarriage, and her father remarries multiple times. Fatima repeatedly injures herself as she climbs up trees and down wells in an

effort to find more space in which to move. To aid in her recovery from her injuries – in particular her broken legs whose wounds become infected – her family allows her to live in Anne's home. Anne is a British neighbour who lives in the village as an expatriate horse trainer. After a doctor's visit arranged by Anne, Fatima's leg is amputated. Her body as her most intimate home is itself shrunken, and her disability renders her even more captive. She soon moves back to her father's house, where she abandons her crutches and becomes a crawling mute. She spends her days in bitterness while Sardoub attempts to placate her.

In a recent preface to the fifteenth anniversary edition of her book *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* Lila Abu-Lughod describes *The Tent* as "a troubled mythopoetic rumination on Bedouin women and poetry" (xxiv). For Abu-Lughod, Fatima's experience of her home is characterised by captivity, resentment, bitterness, and ultimately madness. Her desperation to move beyond the boundaries of the property manifests metaphorically in the confluence of the worlds inside and outside of her mind. Through a spatial lens, Fatima's experiences of space go beyond inside and outside, as she also escapes the everyday plane through depth and height. The time she spends up trees, down the well, sleeping on the floor with the slaves, and eventually crawling on the floor as a madwoman, are the times in the text when she is most free. Fatima's visits to her internal desert mostly coincide with the time she spends in these spaces. That this narrative of enclosure transpires within a Bedouin settlement elevates its claustrophobia. Characters from a migrant culture that inhabit a captive space is a paradox that generates a feeling of discomfort and anxiety. In many ways, the image of Fatima's nomadic father's tent, which is periodically pitched outside the high and rigid walls of the house, is the flexibility for which Fatima longs.

Al-Tahawy hails from the al-Hanadi tribe, and grew up in a Bedouin settlement named Geziret Saoud located in the Eastern Nile Delta (Hassan 3). As is the case in her

fiction, much of her critical work is tethered to questions of gender. Al-Tahawy's first fiction publication, a collection of short stories titled *The Exceptional Steppe Antelope*, was soon followed by *The Tent*, her first novel, of which the English version appeared in 1998. Her second novel, *The Blue Aubergine*, appeared in 2000, and her most recent novel, *Brooklyn Heights*, in 2011. Scholarly writing on *The Tent* centres on women and madness; for instance, Dalya Abudi includes *The Tent* as one of two in-depth analyses in her chapter on self-alienation and madness in the face of patriarchal oppression and maternal deprivation in her book *Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women's Literature: The Family Frontier.* In her 2016 text *Literary Madness in British, Postcolonial, and Bedouin Women's Writing*, Shahd Alshammari reads subaltern madwomen such as Fatima in *The Tent* alongside the familiar madwomen of Victorian literature to interrogate this established trope and its intersections with patriarchy and colonialism. In her thesis titled "The Muslim Female Body in Twenty-First-Century Discourses by Arab and Arab American Women Writers", Nancy El-Gendy focuses on the construction and interrogation of the Muslim female body – the primary, intimate home of the self – in 21ˢᵗ century writings from across the globe, including *The Tent.* As the body's interactions with the environments that act upon it is part of El-Gendy's approach, her work is an important point of methodological reference for my own discussions. The main spatial divisions in *The Tent* occur between conceptions of inside and outside, up and down, open and enclosed. By contrast, space is figured transnationally in *Lyrics Alley.*

Lyrics Alley by Aboulela is written from multiple viewpoints and is set primarily in 1950s Umdurman and Cairo. At this time Sudan was an Anglo-Egyptian province, but talks of independence were underway. The text examines the regional complexities in the Sahel, which derives its name from the Arabic ساحل (sāḥil) or "coast", signifying its position at the edge of the Sahara. It is a geographical marker of the religious and cultural divisions between

North Africa and the rest of the continent. In *Lyrics Alley,* however, the Sahel does not perform a divisive function, but is a space of transition and, in some ways, unification. This is represented on a smaller scale in the home of Mahmoud Abuzeid, a successful Sudanese businessman. His two wives run separate households on opposite ends of their mansion in Umdurman, the second largest city in Sudan. Mahmoud constantly negotiates between the younger, modern, Egyptian Nabilah and the older, conservative, Sudanese Hajjah Waheeba. Nabilah and Waheeba's characters manifest in the materiality of their homes: their furnishings and décor encapsulate their femininities and nationalities. The narrative reaches its climax when, after an argument, Waheeba has Nabilah's daughter, Ferial, lured over to her quarters. Against the wishes of Nabilah and Mahmoud, and without their knowledge, Waheeba has Ferial's genital excision performed. Nabilah is furious and demands that Mahmoud divorce Waheeba. When he refuses, Nabilah moves to Cairo to live with her mother Qadriyyah. Returned to her maternal home, in what she considers to be the modern other to Umdurman, Nabilah rejects her position as a mother and wife. The other narratives in *Lyrics Alley* converge on Nur Abuzeid, Mahmoud's son with Waheeba, who suffers an accident in the ocean that causes him to be paralysed. As a result, Mahmoud dissolves Nur's engagement to Mahmoud's niece, Soraya. Nur channels his heartbreak creatively, and Waheeba's home becomes a salon for poets and musicians. Soraya, in turn, battles her father's patriarchal rule, and her sister's enforcement thereof. She graduates as a doctor, and marries a friend of Nur's. Her wish for a progressive femininity is fuelled by her admiration for Nabilah, and on Soraya's honeymoon she visits the older woman in Cairo.

Lyrics Alley is Aboulela's fourth novel. Her work has been the subject of academic research for more than a decade, and she has received multiple literary prizes. She published her debut novel, *The Translator*, in 1999, and followed this with her second book, a collection of short stories titled *Coloured Lights* in 2001. *Minaret* and *Lyrics Alley* were

published in 2005 and 2010, and her latest novel, *The Kindness of Enemies,* appeared in 2015. With an Egyptian mother and Sudanese father, Aboulela was born in Cairo and raised in Khartoum. After studying in London, she eventually moved to Aberdeen, where she lived for many years until her recent move to Abu Dhabi (Aboulela et al. 80). Aboulela's translocations are apparent in her work. The narratives often straddle disparate locations, and the resulting geo-cultural complexities shape the lives and identities of characters. As with Aboulela's other texts, *Lyrics Alley* has generated scholarship on issues relating to the politics of translation, Arab-Islamic femininities and diasporic identities. Ahmed Gamal and Abdel Wahab's "Counter-Orientalism: Retranslating the 'Invisible Arab' in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*" focuses on cultural translation and the de-Orientalising of Arab-Islamic subjects. In "Voicing Marginality: Disability in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*", Ken Junior Lipenga discusses poetry as a means to give voice to the disabled. There has been no spatial focus in scholarship on *Lyrics Alley*, despite the fact that the novel is primarily shaped by national and transnational space as it figures within city and domestic places.
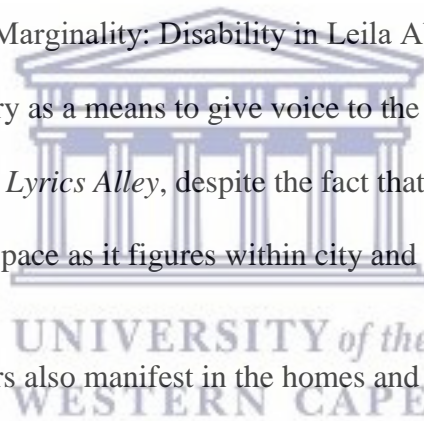
Similarly, larger powers also manifest in the homes and small places in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* The action of this novel takes place mainly in the Alao household. The Alao home is shared by Ishola Alao – referred to as Baba Segi – and his four wives. In order of seniority, they are Iya Segi, Iya Femi, Iya Tope and Bolanle. Whereas the senior wives are referred to by the title "Iya" (mother) and the name of their eldest child, Bolanle's name marks her as childless. The narrative is set in Ibadan, one of the largest and oldest cities in Nigeria. Although all the wives grew up within driving distance of the city, the spaces of their youth are disparate. Bolanle, Iya Segi and Iya Femi all hail from established towns with strong trade and industry, and Iya Tope comes from an agricultural settlement. Although a university graduate, the protagonist Bolanle forgoes a career to enter the Alao home in search of a safe space in which to forget her sexual abuse.

The senior wives are illiterate and, although two of them are very intelligent, they feel threatened by Bolanle. Iya Segi and Iya Femi mock her taste in crockery, damage what few possessions she owns, banish her friends from the home and begrudge her an armchair, which has a very specific symbolic value related to motherhood in the novel. It soon becomes clear that Bolanle's unpopularity is rooted in the threat of discovery. The senior wives know that Bolanle will not fall pregnant and will thereby expose the secret that none of Baba Segi's children were fathered by him. When Bolanle and Baba Segi indeed fail to conceive, the ensuing medical investigation forces Bolanle to reveal that she has had an abortion. Despite this trauma, the doctor declares Bolanle fertile, and reveals Baba Segi's infertility to him. Iya Segi's and Iya Femi's various schemes to remove Bolanle from the home fail, and their final plot has a tragic outcome. Segi, the eldest child of the household, eats a poisoned meal intended for Bolanle and ultimately dies. These events drive Baba Segi to present an ultimatum: the wives who wish to leave his home may do so, but those who choose to stay must submit entirely to his authority. Bolanle finally processes her past trauma and removes herself from the purgatory of Baba Segi's home. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is a prime text for a study of homosocial space as the four women relate to Baba Segi's home in different ways. As the characters take turns to focalise chapters, their memories reveal how their identities were shaped by the spaces of their youth. This narrative technique also reveals how the wives respectively experience the Alao home as a domain, a prison, a hostile-but-safe hiding place, and a source of economic stability.

Dubbed a third-generation Nigerian writer (9) in Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton's "Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations", Shoneyin's debut poetic works were soon followed by her first novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. It has subsequently become a subject of feminist studies such as those of Olesegun Adekoya, Chielozona Eze, F. Fiona Moolla and Yunusy Castory

Ng'umbi. In "Love's Metamorphosis in Third-Generation African Women's Writing: The Example of Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*", Adekoya compares Shoneyin's "radical feminist" treatment of adultery to those of the first-generation Nigerian writers (333). Adekoya also touches on the subject of feminine spaces in her treatment of the kitchen, but her focus is on the kitchen as a space that challenges patriarchal rule. In overview, the primary difference between Adekoya's reading of the text and my own is that Adekoya interprets the female interactions in terms of her statement that "[t]hird-generation African female writing emphasises bonding as a strategy by women to overcome the challenge of male tyranny" (354). My argument, by contrast, is that this "male tyranny" can also infiltrate female homosocial spaces to construct patriarchal women who oppress other women. In "Feminist Empathy: Unsettling African Cultural Norms in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*", Chielozona Eze builds on the work of Carol Boyce Davies to argue for writing and reading women's intersubjective relationships in a way that grants them individuated agency (324). Yunusy Castory Ng'umbi's 2015 dissertation *Politics of the Family in Contemporary East and West African Women's Writing* focusses on how third-generation East and West African Women writers have reimagined the family motif through the renegotiation of gender roles (50). Like Adekoya, Ng'umbi constructs these interactions as women's resistance to the patriarchal order (74), whereas my discussion cautions against the assumption that women's spaces and interactions are necessarily free of patriarchal influence and therefore inherently subversive or transformative. In fact, as my readings of the texts at hand will show, women's spaces can produce and reinforce patriarchy through the construction of patriarchal women. In behavioural studies, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* also makes an appearance in Omotayo F. Siwoku-Awi's "De-masking Institutionalised Mental Disorders in Male/Female Relationships", in which Iya Segi's rash attempt to poison Bolanle is used as an illustrative example of how certain configurations of male-female

relationships can result in mental imbalance for women (6206). The domestic and small, private-public places thus shape the greater part of the action in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

Similar places are prominent in *Swallow*, where they are also impacted by the larger context of a Nigerian city. However, as Lagos is much larger than Ibadan, urban space is more central to *Swallow*, whose interrogations extend across the city. A prominent economic hub and currently the largest city in Africa, Lagos enjoys frequent engagement by scholars and authors alike. In "City, Identity and Dystopia: Writing Lagos in Contemporary Nigerian Novels", Rita Nnodim states that Lagos is written as a city that "astounds the senses, a vibrant city of many cultures and languages, but also a dystopian space of deprivation, despair and dislocation" (103). This ambiguous Lagos is also the Lagos of *Swallow*. Every morning, protagonist Tolani Ajao and her friend, Rose Adamson, depart from their shared apartment to traverse the city, embarking on an extensive travel "regimen" to work at a bank. During the commute, the women share their emotional and financial hardships. While Tolani negotiates her relationship with her fiancé, Sanwo, Rose encourages independence and a ruthless approach to relationships. However, when Rose is dismissed from her position at the bank, she becomes dependent on a drug trafficker known as "OC". Dreaming of financial independence and a glamorous life abroad, she agrees to smuggle condoms stuffed with cocaine out of the country in her stomach. Tolani, suffering financial pressure after Sanwo loses her money in a scam, agrees to do the same, but fails to swallow the condoms, and cancels her contract with OC and Rose. Rose continues the journey without Tolani, and the cocaine-filled condom ruptures in Rose's stomach. She dies before leaving Nigeria. Tolani, distraught, returns to her hometown to be nursed back to mental and physical health by her mother, whose narrative is interspersed with Tolani's throughout the text.
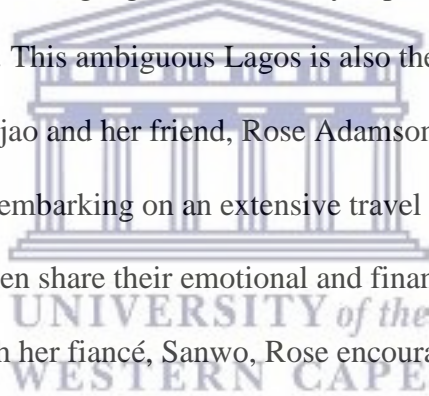
Sefi Atta was born to a Yoruba mother and non-practicing Muslim father in Nigeria. In an interview with Amy Boaz of *Publisher's Weekly,* Atta states that she grew up in Nigeria, was schooled in England and has been living in Mississippi for the past decade (Boaz 25). She does not consider herself to be Yoruba, but prefers to think of herself as Nigerian, and writes about characters that have no "strong ethnic allegiance" (Collins 123). She creates imperfect female protagonists that negotiate various obstacles, but her narratives maintain a humorous tone and engage fully with the context in which they take place. In "The Prison of Nigerian Woman: Female Complicity in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*", Florence Orabueze praises Atta's treatment of Nigerian femininity, stating that Atta "boldly acknowledges the Nigerian woman's complicity and the active role she plays in muffling her voice against an unjust system" (99). Atta published her debut novel, *Everything Good Will Come* in 2004, a short story collection, *News from Home* in 2009, and her third novel, *A Bit of Difference*, in 2012. Atta's second novel, *Swallow*, has also been well received.

In *Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition*, Walter Collins presents a range of scholarship on Atta's literature. Of primary interest is the chapter "Female Alter-Native Publics, ImagiNations, and Cityness in Sefi Atta's Lagos Novels" by Rita Nnodim, which explores how female characters use "urban sociality" to negotiate public space in *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow*.[4] Bernard Oniwe's chapter, "Images and Voices of Lagos in Sefi Atta's Novels", explores Atta's Lagos as a city with both "unpleasant and redemptive qualities" in *Everything Good Will Come* and

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[4] A version of this study also appears in *African City Textualities* as the chapter "City, Identity and Dystopia: Writing Lagos in Contemporary Nigerian novels".

Swallow. Elizabeth Olaoye's chapter, "The influene of Lagos on Women in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*", reads the Lagos of *Everything Good Will Come* as a place that constructs women's agency. As is the case with Nnodim and Oniwe, Olaoye's study offers useful insight into the intersections between city space and gender in the context of Atta's fiction. The study of homosocial relationships makes an appearance in Rose Sackeyfio's "Recasting Sisterhood and its Ambiguities: Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow*." Sackeyfio studies how "sisterhood" aids women characters in overcoming Nigerian patriarchal systems. Ng'umbi, mentioned above, argues that the city-dwellers in *Swallow* create ad-hoc family structures to overcome the centrifugal force of Lagos, which destroys intimate relationships (113-114). Marlene de la Cruz-Guzmán's dissertation, titled "Of Masquerading and Weaving Tales of Empowerment: Gender, Composite Consciousness, and Culture-specificity in the Early Novels of Sefi Atta and Laila Lalami", traces the development of women's consciousness in relation to culture-specific practices and experiences in Casablanca, Morocco and Lagos. In the case of *Swallow* as in the other novels under discussion, various scholars have explored feminist questions as well as spatial and homosocial concerns in the novel. However, when these three concepts are triangulated in the novels studied, an unexpected trend emerges in the spatial construction of patriarchal femininity. Sackeyfio and Ng'umbi's claims of women's spaces and relationships as affirming and supportive structures thus become problematic, as the discussions in this thesis reveal that these places are often oppressive. In analyses of small places, such as the home, one finds not the sense of sisterhood and safety expected, but rampant patriarchal rule by a female proxy.

Homosocial Places and the Construction of the Female Patriarch

Much of the tension between African and Anglo-American feminism has been alluded to here and is further discussed in the first chapter. Upon this foundation, I shall provide an overview of prominent African feminist thinkers and their key contributions. Naomi Nkealah offers an important overview and critique of how Western and West African feminisms operate in "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges". Key among Nkealah's observations is that African feminists condemn the "exclusionary practices of white Western feminisms" on two levels: their demonisation of men as the enemy, and the classification of African women as "women of colour" and the repression of their historical trajectory in mainstream Western feminisms (62). In "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse", Oyèrónké Oyĕwùmí echoes Ngũgĩ's argument that Western scholarship epistemologically dominates Africa, and adds that this imposes a "gender imperialism" (26). For Oyĕwùmí, the very concept of gender is divergent in its Western and African conceptualisations. She argues that, in Yoruba communities, "woman" only came into existence as a biological category after contact with the West (31). In Yoruba societies, gender is socially constructed. Although one would argue that Anglo-American scholarship has long maintained that gender is also socially constructed in the West, there is still a pervading societal belief in gender's biological determination. Oyĕwùmí claims that this norm is absent in Yoruba communities, and that social positions and functions are not restricted to members of a specific sex. In "Speaking as a Woman", Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo also notes that "most African societies were matrilineages lasting millennia, from the prepharaonic period all the way down to a micronation like the Akans of Ghana" (379). Aidoo further explains that these social patterns were only disrupted with the gradual introduction of Islam and Christianity (379). Regardless of the validity of Oyĕwùmí and Aidoo's statements, in the postcolonial contexts of the texts in this study, it is not only

colonial and postcolonial ideological developments that prevent me from reading the texts

through a precolonial lens, but also the pervading presence of global capitalist modernity and

the spatial penetration of power. This is a problem faced by the majority of scholars of

African literature, as much of Anglophone African literature is set in colonial or postcolonial

contexts. As an alternative methodology for scholars of African literature, Oyěwùmí echoes

Nnaemeka in stating that African women and texts should be studied within the context of

their origin. From this African context a plethora of African feminist discourses originate,

including womanism, nego-feminism, stiwanism[5], *Umoja[6]* and motherism. As there is much

overlap between these variations, I shall only engage the concepts of womanism, nego-

feminism and motherism here.

The local version of bell hooks' "womanism" is articulated by Chikwenye Ogunyemi

in *African Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*, and similarly focuses on the

doubly marginalised position of the black woman. For Ogunyemi, the need for a reimagining

of hooks' work in the context of Africa arises from the additional layer of marginalisation

constructed by Euro-American patriarchy in a globalised world. Ogunyemi identifies the

cornerstones of African womanism to be an inclusive, caring approach to the "familial,

communal, national and international" (119). Scale therefore plays an important role in

Ogunyemi's womanism, which allows it to tackle and absorb opposing systems within

multiple spaces. Nnaemeka similarly emphasises the importance of the geo-cultural context

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[5] See Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's 1989 work *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*.

[6] See Mary Modupe Kolawole's 1997 work *Womanism and African Consciousness*.

in "'Nego-feminism': Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way". Her

conceptualisation of a feminism of negotiation is predicated on the fact that African women

have to be able to dynamically "detonate" or "go around patriarchal land mines" (378); it is

not a rigid, antagonistic paradigm like much of Western feminism, but takes the form of an

adaptive process. In Nnaemeka's articulation, too, space plays a constitutive role in how each

woman shapes her own feminism. Nnaemeka's choice of the spatial metaphor of navigation

is an appropriate visualisation of a feminism "on the ground", constructed from the

particularities of each African woman's life. Catherine Acholonu's "motherism" as

adumbrated in *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* is a similarly dynamic

approach. She echoes Oyĕwùmí's point that gender as a determiner of social power is a

Western construct foreign to African practices (44). As in the case of Nnaemeka and

Ogunyemi, Acholonu argues that African feminism is not an aggressive feminism that is

defined in opposition to men, but instead seeks a "dynamically organic approach" (93) of

cooperation. For Acholonu, this approach is best encapsulated in the concept of "motherism",

as motherhood often requires a cooperation between genders, and as all peoples originated

from Africa, the mother continent of humanity. Nkealah notes that the key motherist figure is

a "romanticised rural woman" that serves as an example to the "modern urban woman who is

bereft of virtue" ("West African Feminisms" 64). Although this creates a problematic binary

between urban and rural femininity, one can nevertheless see that here, too, space is a

constitutive aspect of African feminism. Rural identity represents the African continent itself

and its place in relation to the rest of the world, and serves as a source of power for the

movement. It is therefore arguable that, along with generally being characterised as more

dynamic, negotiative and focussed on the particular than Western feminisms, African

feminisms have a situatedness that foregrounds the importance of space and place in the

African woman's life. However, the importance of space in African feminisms is also the root
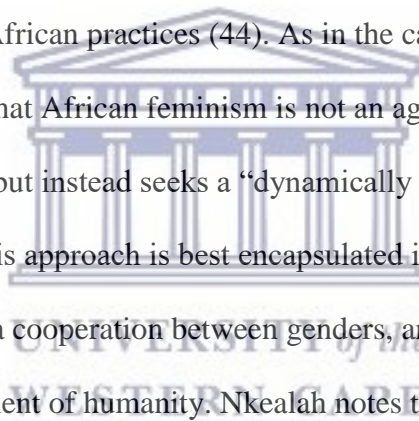
of its underlying exclusionary logic. As Nkealah notes in both "Internal and External Crises
Africa's Feminism: Learning from Oral Narratives" and "(West) African Feminisms and
Their Challenges", the insider/outsider logic of African feminisms leaves little room for
diasporic and queer African identities.

African feminisms are similarly critiqued for largely excluding Muslim African
women. In *Privately Empowered: Expressing Feminism in Islam in Northern Nigerian
Fiction*, Shirin Edwin evaluates various Islamic and African feminist paradigms to aid in her
study of Islamic feminisms in Northern Nigerian contexts. However, from either direction she
is unable to find a compatible approach:

> In their treatment of the "Muslim world," Islamic feminists elliptically
> reference Africa. *Privately Empowered* attributes this negligence to the
> fetishisation of political and public engagements in Islam as is the case in most
> societies in the Middle East that are Islamic nation-states. As for African
> feminism, African theorists uphold Africa's plurality but excoriate Islam's
> influence on the African Muslim woman and call Islam "religious
> colonialism." The African feminist injunction of "building on the indigenous,"
> as Obioma Nnaemeka confidently recommends, where "African worldviews
> are capable of providing the theoretical rack on which to hang African
> literature," woefully falls short when African feminists read African-Islamic
> feminist literature, since Islam, as made plain in 'Zulu Sofola's words, "de-
> womanized" the African woman. (36)

For Edwin, understanding Islam as religious colonialism imposes a narrative on
African Islamic women that is not true to their existence. This trivialises their realities in

much the same way that Eurocentric feminisms reduce the lives of African women to narratives of oppression. According to Edwin, many African theorists argue that "African traditional institutions are friendlier to women's social progress" than Islam, and that women are "happier, freer and richer" where Islam has not become "entrenched" (51). Edwin contends that an African Islamic woman's feminism can be drawn from both the African and Islamic particularities of her context. Edwin argues that this feminism is a private one, exercised on the smaller scales within the personal and familial spheres, but is no less powerful as a result. However, this focused study of the domestic appears to obscure and even efface the multiscalar nature of space and power in Edwin's argument. This is not to say that African Islamic households are necessarily patriarchal by virtue of the fact that they are Islamic; for example, Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* offers a view of a bright future for Sudanese Muslim women in the character of Soraya and her budding household. However, Edwin's argument that African Muslim women would likely abstain from Islamic habits and rituals if Islam were truly patriarchal (37) fails to take the systemic, multiscalar nature of space and power into account. Much of what happens in the privacy of the home, and even the body, is constructed at the level of the community, town or nation. Women that engage in patriarchal acts willingly and with complete agency strengthen the system and thereby aid in the oppression of other women. This will be analysed in the study of the patriarchal women in the texts at hand, most notably Iya Segi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* Grandmother Hakima in *The Tent,* Waheeba and Nabilah in *Lyrics Alley* and, to a lesser extent, Rose in *Swallow.*

As the concept of patriarchal women is rarely explored, two extreme examples serve as an illustrative introduction to the discussion. In "Patriarchal Women: A Case Study of Newly Orthodox Jewish Women", Debra Renee Kaufman examines why, despite "women's second class status" within Jewish orthodox systems, newly Orthodox women voluntarily

enter into these systems (299). Although they find ways to use the system to negotiate their

marital and familial roles, and celebrate their femininity, they do not challenge the "male

hegemony in the public, legal community" and the gendered division of labour (310).

Similarly, Richard Nielsen notes the rise of female Salafi Muslim preachers in "Women's

Authority in Patriarchal Social Movements: The Case of Female Salafi Preachers". Nielsen

argues that "patriarchal social movements may empower women when it furthers the

movement's political goals" (3), and that "women in positions of authority can work to

perpetuate patriarchy" (4). In these examples, women not only tolerate and participate in the

patriarchal system but also actively defend and further its interests. My use of the term

"patriarchal women" will therefore refer to women who depend on a patriarchal system for

their power, and in many cases use this power to oppress other women. Where I refer to such

women as "patriarchs by proxy", I am alluding to the fact that they are performing the

functions of a patriarch in the household by oppressing the other women using patriarchal

discourses. Matriarchs, on the other hand, have authority that is rooted in their femininity,

rather than borrowed in spite of it. Although it is impossible to make generalised statements

regarding the motivations of patriarchal women, their existence is arguably predicated on

patriarchal contexts. Women who live in overtly patriarchal nation-states are more likely to

be exposed to patriarchal systems in all the spaces within which they move, including their

homes. Patriarchal space can thus construct patriarchal women, and enable them to oppress

other women. This is not to say that all women in patriarchal spaces come to adopt

patriarchal norms, or that patriarchal spaces cannot be transformed. In fact, even spaces that

are overtly oppressive can construct feminist identities, albeit within specific boundaries that

are set by the larger system. Such examples will be discussed in the section to follow. Thus,

although the focus of my study is those instances in which patriarchal space constructs

patriarchal women, the relationship between space and the social remains mutually

constitutive, and therefore is complex and open to transformation.

As the patriarchal women discussed in this study exercise their power over other

women, the concept of homosociality is key to understanding the intersections of space and

social dynamics in these texts. In *Latex and Lingerie: Shopping for Pleasure at Ann

Summers*, sociologist Merl Storr traces the topic of homosociality in cultural studies and

sociology. In its most common usage, the term "homosociality" refers to "social relationships

between members of the same sex" which are "non-sexual", usually in the context of male

social behaviour (39). The term "homosociality" was popularised by two theorists with

contrasting definitions, and both are still utilised in contemporary research. According to

Storr, the work of Jean Lipman-Blumen predominates in the field of sociology, whereas Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick is the preferred authority for those in cultural studies or critical theory

(40). In "Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation

of Social Institutions", Lipman-Blumen defines homosociality as "the seeing, enjoyment,

and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (16). Sedgwick's focus is somewhat

different as she is interested firstly in the internal logic of homosocial interactions

themselves. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* she defines

male homosociality as "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (Sedgwick 696).

Sedgwick considers homosociality to be a triangular configuration between men and other

men, as well as between men and women. Whereas men have non-sexual relationships with

other men that promote each other's interests politically, economically, socially or otherwise,

women are in essence excluded from these kinds of relationships, and enter them only as

objects of desire and exchange (710-711).

Scholars such as Sedgwick have mostly considered homosociality, as they defined it, to be exclusively male behaviour. Storr rejects this, and adapts Sedgwick's model for the study of male homosociality to be applicable to the study of women, with the aid of R.W. Connell's conception of a gender regime, which is "the state of play in gender relations in a given institution" (120). For Connell, gender regimes permeate all kinds of institutions, such as markets, states and informal peer groups, but are most obvious in formal organisations such as schools (120). The interplay between institutional structure and negotiation ensure that gender regimes operate as "sites of conflict, resistance and violence – and also of compromise, complicity and negotiation" (Storr 45). The gender regime thus determines which forms of masculinity are dominant or "hegemonic" in any context. For Connell, "hegemonic masculinity" is "constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (183). These hegemonic masculinities can dominate within a particular regime as well as within the gender order of society as a whole (120). According to Connell, because of women's overall subordination to men, one cannot accurately call a particular femininity "hegemonic" (183). Storr further develops Connell's approach to balance structure, context, personal preference and underlying consistency. This consistency allows for the identification of homosocial gender regimes, but an important part of the commonality is difference: the figure of hegemonic masculinity will differ within each institution.

From the work of Lipman-Blumen, Sedgwick and Connell, Storr formulates her definition of female homosociality as "a variety of gender regimes with three distinctive structural features: women promoting the interests of women who promote the interests of men; gender identification […] and lesbophobia" (50). Storr's model differs from Sedgwick's in the use of "gender identification" instead of referencing a "hegemonic femininity" (50). Furthermore, where Sedgwick argues that male homosociality promotes the interests of men,

Storr argues that female homosociality promotes "the interests of women who promote the interests of men" (50). Storr avoids referring to "hegemonic" femininity due to Connell's argument that the term cannot apply to femininities as a result of women's subordinate position within the gender order (Storr 51). However, as Connell also states that hegemonic gender roles are specific to a gender regime, and female homosocial gender regimes do not involve contending with masculine gender roles, I do not object to referring to hegemonic femininities within female homosocial gender regimes. The reason Storr's use of "gender identification" in this definition falls short is that it underplays the fact that there are definite "wrong" kinds of femininities within homosocial gender regimes, and this is determined by the dominant or "right" hegemonic femininity within that particular context. For example, Bolanle's status as a graduate in the Alao home in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, marks her as different to her illiterate co-wives. However, compared to their practical homemaking skills, her degree is useless in the context of the Alao home. Iya Segi, who is resourceful, a good mother and adept at performing household tasks, embodies the hegemonic or dominant femininity in the house.

In Storr's second deviation from Sedgwick's definition, she asserts that female homosociality does not promote the interests of women, but rather the interests of women who promote the interests of men. In this scenario, both the women in question as well as the larger patriarchal order benefit from the women's homosocial interaction. Storr argues that the structure of female homosociality secures heterosexual women's privilege as well as the privilege of men. Although one cannot argue with the validity of her observation that this occurs in female homosocial gender regimes, and my study shows the same, I challenge Storr's inclusion of the promotion of men's interests as a foundational feature of female homosociality. Female homosocial interactions do not necessarily "promote the interests of women who promote the interests of men" (Storr 50), but can promote the interests of women

who promote the interests of women. As such, the promotion of the interests of men is only produced within selected gender regimes with a patriarchal femininity, such as the ones produced by the literary spaces in this study. Whereas Sedgwick argues that male homosociality promotes the interests of men, and Storr argues that female homosociality promotes the interests of women who promote the interest of men, I contend that female homosociality promotes the interests of women who promote the interests of women or men. Female friendships can empower women and give them agency, but the negotiation of homosocial politics can also lead to the re-subjugation of emancipated women by their peers. What is more, these dynamics are spatially produced, not just socially.

As a further introduction to the concept, I shall examine three primary configurations of influence in homosocial relationships: women who empower and further the interests of other women; women who appear to further the interests of other women, but in fact do not challenge the status quo; and women's homosocial interactions that further the interests of men. According to Nnaemeka, the first configuration – women's homosocial interactions that empower women – is common in writing by African women writers. In her article "Urban Spaces, Women's Places: Polygamy as Sign in Mariama Bâ's Novels", she opines that African women writers often portray "the affirming and empowering friendship between women inside and outside of marriage" (170). As discussed earlier with the examples of Eze, Ng'umbi and Sackeyfio, empowering female friendships are often presented as a form of resistance or a counter-measure to patriarchal power. Another example is found Francoise Lionnet's "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra", in which Lionnet compares the authors' differing representations of women's captivity, and interactions among women in prison. Another example of women forming protective bonds with one another is in Sorcha Gunne's exploration of gendered violence in *Place and Gendered Violence in South African Writing*.

Gunne examines how women travelling by train in Miriam Tlali's *Footprints in the Quag:*
Stories and Dialogues from Soweto can reclaim the space from "the state and patriarchal
dominance" (xv) when women protect each other against gender-based violence. In "Lessons
in solidarity: Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ on female victim(izer)s", Laura Dubek
analyses the portrayal of homosocial relationships between women in Emecheta's *The Joys of*
Motherhood and Bâ's *Une si longue lettre (So Long a Letter)* and *Un chant écarlate (Scarlet*
Song). Among her findings is that *So Long a Letter* "testifies to the healing power of female
friendship" (Dubek 212). Protagonist Ramatoulaye's friendship with Aissatou has a "mutual
commitment to providing the emotional and material support each needs to define and assert
themselves in a patriarchal society that encourages women to view each other as rivals for the
attention and protection of men" (215). There is thus an expectation that women form a bond
of solidarity when they occupy the same small spaces, thereby offering resistance to the
oppressive forces in their context. However, as the findings in this thesis suggest, many small
spaces construct relationships between women that are oppressive.

In the texts under discussion, homosocial relationships between women are most
frequently constructed within domestic spaces. This is partially a result of the cultural
contexts within which these texts are set. Homes influenced by Arab-Islamic tradition and
those influenced by indigenous African tradition are both at least potentially polygamous[7]; in

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[7] I deliberately use the term "polygamy" rather than "polygyny". The latter concept –
based on the Greek – potentially translates either to "many women" or to "many wives." In
"Bringing African Women into the Classroom: Rethinking Pedagogy and Epistemology"
Nnaemeka argues that "[p]olygyny as 'many women' places the Western man with one wife

two of the four texts discussed here, polygamous homes offer spatial intersections between women, and add to the complexity of spatial division within the home. In "Polygamy in African Fiction", Vuyiswa Ndabayakhe and Catherine Addison counter Nnaemeka's assertion that co-wives can develop liberating homosocial relationships. In studying representations of polygamous marriages in a range of African fiction, the authors determine that positive relationships between co-wives are usually either absent or the inverse: co-wives often traumatise and oppress one another. As evidence, they cite homosocial relationships between co-wives in works including Es'kia Mphahlele's *Chirundu,* Ousmane Sembène's *Xala,* Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate (Scarlet Song)*, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood.* Positive relationships between co-wives are usually only present in the works of male authors, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Onuora Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards.* Dubek also offers views of oppressive and damaging female homosocial relationships in her study of *The Joys of Motherhood* and Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song:*
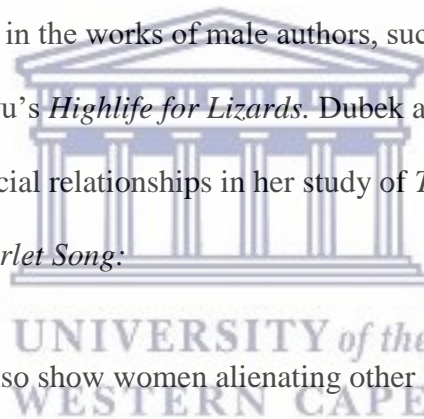
These novels also show women alienating other women to protect their

own privileged status or reputations, suggesting that while all women

suffering in differing degrees from various forms of sexist oppression, racism

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and one or more mistresses in the same category as the African man who legitimizes his relationship with more than one woman" (325). For this reason, I use "polygamy" rather than "polygyny" in this thesis, as the former is a more exact description of the situations in the texts I examine.

and classism are evils often perpetuated by women, against women. Simply

put, our sisterhood does not erase or protect us from our differences. (220)

Dubek offers an important point of departure for my study in her reminder that all

women – including patriarchal women – suffer from patriarchal oppression, even if this

applies in varying degrees to different women. Dubek also reminds us that sexism should be

studied in its intersections with racism and classism as other oppressive systems of power.

Although my focus is different in that I study the spatially constructed patriarchal oppression

of women by women, Ndabayakhe and Addison's findings regarding hostile homosocial

relationships in polygamous contexts and Dubek's similar findings centred on class and racial

oppression between women remain key precedents for the study of hostile homosocial

relationships between women in postcolonial contexts.

The examples traced by Dubek and Ndabayakhe and Addison constitute the kind of

female homosocial interaction that does not further the interests of women. This category of

women's homosocial relationships appears in two broad configurations. In the first, women

pretend to further the interests of women, but do not actively work to find redress. This does

not feature prominently in this study. The second homosocial relationship that does not

further the interests of women actively inhibits the furthering of women's interests. This

occurs in Dubek and Ndabayakhe and Addison's examples above, as well as the texts under

discussion in this thesis. However, my examples differ from the examples above in that

women police women's identities specifically in ways that further the interests of men (e.g.

by promoting women's deference to male authority). These characters internalise the system

that oppresses them, and become part of its fabric. In light of these findings, I shall make the

following adaptations to Storr's definition of female homosociality for the purposes of this

study: Storr states that "[F]emale homosociality is a variety of gender regimes with three

distinctive structural features: women promoting the interests of women who promote the interests of men; gender identification, […] and lesbophobia" (50). I argue that female homosociality is a variety of gender regimes with two distinctive structural features: women promoting the interests of either other women or men, and a hegemonic femininity contingent on the given gender regime.[8] In my study of the spatial construction of patriarchal femininities, I shall focus only on homosocial spaces and hegemonic femininities that promote the interests of men.

Plotting Cultural Difference

In "Thinking Igbo, Thinking African" Chimalum Nwankwo articulates the very literal connection between space and culture in his own context of Igbo Nigeria: "[T]here were always distinctions, ritual-based and underogatory, between those who lived abroad and those who lived at home. […] It was something based on closeness with the earth, with *omenana* (tradition), with the cumulative and accumulating knowledge and mastery of all the rites and rituals of communal identification with the total Aro cosmos" (393). This "cumulative and accumulating" knowledge privy to those who live at home is imparted to them because they move through the homes, compounds and markets that bear the artefacts and furnishings of their heritage, attend events, aid in making decisions, and encounter significant people. Nwankwo emphasises that "the custodians of the culture always led and will always lead by virtue of proximity" (394) – their ability to reproduce culture is determined spatially. This is

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[8] As the lesbophobic element that Storr identifies is not relevant to the interactions in the texts at hand, I cannot engage with this element of Storr's definition.

an example of the ways in which culture is constructed spatially, and can, in turn, imprint itself on the function and meaning of space and place.

In the context of modernity, this culture-space nexus was the source of spatial hierarchy. As raised in earlier discussions of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Africa and the Global North considered the Global South to be empty space devoid of meaning, specificity, civilisation and identity. Cultures were categorised, compared and contrasted, and from this a hierarchy emerged that still pervades global networks of power today. In "The Eurasian Origins of Empty Time and Space: Modernity as Temporality Reconsidered", William Reddy identifies the formative aspects of modern conceptions of space and culture in modern science. Instruments and processes of measure inspired "mathematically expressed laws [that] apply uniformly across time and space", while the development of the modern nation state inspired authority and legal systems that "apply with perfect uniformity throughout its territory" (327). Thus, modernity conceives of both time and space as "empty" to be "mapped" by scientific methods. For Tally, the emergence of "monopoly capital and imperialism, particularly in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries", contributed greatly to the development of this new conception of national space, which was "already becoming international" (75). At the same time, philosophy and criticism were experiencing a crisis in representation. Tally summarises this as a paradox: "experience can no longer be both authentic and true, because the material grounds for a person's experience are not apprehensible directly; similarly, the models by which one ascertains the "truth" now elude individual experience" (76). Art and representation repeatedly failed to access truth and objectivity in the same ways that science was apparently capable of. This crisis presented a need for "another level of spatial projection" that could make sense of human experience in ways unpolluted by subjective experience (76). Much of this drive was motivated by imperialism's repeated failure to deal with the cultural difference it was exposed to and
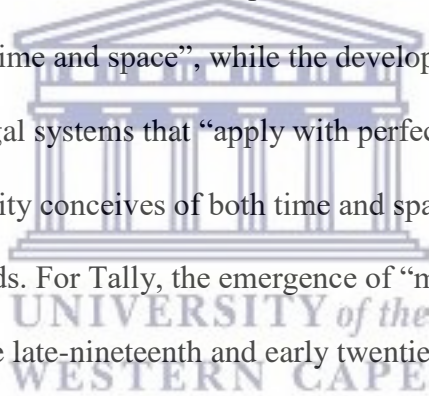
exposing, which took the form of totalising, homogenising narratives that attempted to explain the truth of other peoples' experiences while failing to acknowledge the individuated and particular nature thereof. An example of this ideological approach is evident in Nabilah's treatment of Sudanese women as primitive in *Lyrics Alley.*

Edward Said offered one of the most comprehensive and focussed critiques of modernity's totalising and imperial categorisations of human experience in his pathbreaking studies *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism.* In *Orientalism*, Said expresses outrage at the way the monolithic image of the Orient produced by Anglo-American thought – "Orientalism" – obscured and even shaped the realities of the Orient. Said states that an "observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq or Arabia" (Said, *Orientalism* 54). Tally notes that for Said, where the drive to capture monolithic truths manifested in the Modernist aesthetic, this was "a reaction to the impending breakdown of the imperial system, as the artist attempted to hold an imaginary reality together which was no longer feasible in the 'real world'" (94). This "imaginative geography" (Said 54) creates arbitrary geographical distinctions that define some spaces as familiar and "ours" and other spaces as unfamiliar and "theirs" (54). The mental and cultural significance of geographical boundaries summarises the primary nature of the socio-spatial dialectic in hegemonic Anglo-American culture and criticism in modernity. As Reddy notes, however, this arbitrary separation of the "West and the Rest" – which manifested as a belief in untranslatability between cultures – was not the only modern belief-system, as there were also unified concerns such as astronomy and philology across the greater Eurasia (Reddy 327). Similarly, Saurabh Dube notes in "Mirrors of Modernity" that modernity is too often read as the domain of the West. Studies of subaltern voices have revealed "newer understandings of community, history and modernity, which have challenged prior, modular conceptions", and have "unravelled the terms and

limits of state, nation and citizen in Western and non-Western worlds" (12). Dube's account of marginal and subaltern modernities serves as another demonstration of the errors of modernist spatial arrangement, rooted in the premises of modern science and nationalism. The metanarrative of Western hegemonic modernity is not only challenged by the modernities of the very "others" it produced, but also by its subsequent deconstruction in postmodern conceptions of space.

In *The Location of Culture,* Homi Bhabha identifies Frederic Jameson as a key figure in this movement away from modernity's "idealized aesthetic and disciplinary categories" of the nation state toward the "wayward, uncharted spaces of the cityscape, allegorized in its media images and vernacular visions" (Bhabha, *Location* 214). Tally characterises this shift as gradual: "It is harder to detect the "quantum leap" from this form of nationalist space to the postmodern or global space of late capitalism, but part of the answer lies in the degree to which the national space, that of the "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson so memorably defined a nation, fails to register the utter permeation of capital into formerly undreamed of places" (Tally 76). The collapse of empire and weakening of the modern nation state resulted in a "global or multinational space, thoroughly saturated with capital" (77), which created new problems for the study of space and its relation to culture. Bhabha explains that this difficulty is caused by the fact that we attempt to read stable meaning in that which is fleetingly created in the "interstitial passages and processes of cultural differences" of the "global text" (Bhabha, *Location* 217). As Tally, Foucault, Jameson, Harvey, Appadurai, Bhabha and others emphasise, this increasing complexity and deconstructed state of space in global modernity is further catalysed by the rapid development of information technologies.

In the postmodern period, culture and space have developed a more complex relationship in the face of global networks and flows. The advancement of communication technologies has enabled unprecedented scope for transnational flows of ideas, technologies and economic activity, and has resulted in various levels of mutual influence and integration between geo-cultural groups. The media- and information-saturated context of late capitalism has therefore fundamentally transformed our understanding of space. As Michel Foucault explains in "Of Other Spaces": "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: We are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). Foucault does not present time and space as mutually exclusive concepts. He preserves the dimension of time as the present in which space is observed, represented here as the current "epoch" and "moment" (22). Cultural studies and sociology were quick to explore Foucault's claim that in a fast-moving, always-communicating world we experience time and space as integrated. Arjun Appadurai maps the implications of simultaneity and the instant crossing of space in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. He argues that in the past, political, religious and economic movements developed as "smaller-scale accretions of intimacy and interest" rather than "large-scale ecumenes", as the problem of distance could only be solved at great cost (28). However, technology in the form of Benedict Anderson's "print capitalism" has enabled us to collapse space with the mass dissemination of ideas and power – and the attendant construction of social structures – without the need for physical proximity (Appadurai 28). As this precludes the travel-time required to facilitate face-to-face interaction, the collapse of physical space – or, in some ways, its "mechanical reproduction", to use Walter Benjamin's phrase – also facilitates the collapse of time into simultaneity. David Harvey, too, characterises this "time-space compression", which calls for

new modes of "how we represent the world to ourselves" as characteristic of the processes of

late capitalism (240). This created increasingly complex and volatile, rapidly changing

spaces, which generated anxiety around the difficulties of mapping and navigating them

(Tally 77). Postmodern spatial study also scrutinises spatial difference within societies, such

as the differences between urban and rural space, and spatial organisation within the city and

village itself. As I suggest in my analysis of patriarchal femininities produced by private-

public space in the third chapter, the gendered division of private and public space is also

critiqued as an Anglo-American assumption that does not apply in other contexts. Foucault's

"Of Other Spaces" also offers important insights into socio-spatial organisation in smaller

space, particularly his conception of heterotopic spaces designed to sequester identities that

do not conform to social norms. In the third chapter, the hospital as represented in *The Secret

Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is examined as such a heterotopic space that produces patriarchal

women.
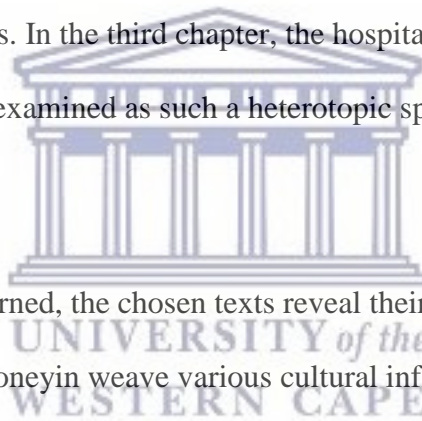
Where culture is concerned, the chosen texts reveal their influences to varying

degrees. Whereas Atta and Shoneyin weave various cultural influences in and out of their

narratives, the characters in Aboulela and al-Tahawy's worlds are built around a dominant

cultural heritage. To facilitate an informed reading in the space allowed, the introduction to

each chapter surveys the relevant aspects of Arab-Islamic, Yoruba and Igbo cultures.

Naturally a cursory survey does not facilitate full engagement with the cultures at hand, but it

does allow a brief introduction to aspects relevant to the subsequent analysis. In his

introduction to *Faces of Islam in African Literature*, Kenneth Harrow outlines some of the

difficulties posed by cultural research: "Despite the common understanding of the term,

'Islam' varies considerably with time, place, and text – reflecting all the diversities of African

culture, as well as particular idiosyncrasies of individual authors. Nonetheless, common

features of history, and similar institutional patterns, allow us to postulate the existence of an

African Islamic culture and literature" ("Introduction" 3). Harrow outlines the risk posed by cross-cultural comparisons to generate monolithic readings. Reducing a cultural paradigm to its essential characteristics risks homogenising a complex system of knowledge and norms that, as Harrow stresses, is adapted and recreated anew in each instantiation. On the other hand, reading each text without contextualising its cultural environment will result in my reading it from the perspective that functions as my default: my own system of reference is that of the white South African urban middle class woman. I shall therefore attempt to balance geo-cultural contextualisation with a reliance on the texts' capacity to craft their own worlds.

Conclusion

In *Spatiality*, Tally summarises the spatiality of literature in its capacity to offer a "situating reference by which [readers] can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live" (2). Literature can also transport spaces and places by helping readers "get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come" (2). In this study, I use the selected novels as tools for socio-geographical inquiry to determine how space can construct patriarchal women who oppress other women in homosocial contexts. I also examine how patriarchal women utilise space in their oppression of other women. Through these analyses I hope to demonstrate that women's spaces are not inherently resistant to patriarchal penetration, and that patriarchy does not attach to a particular gender or character, but is spatially produced. This inquiry may aid in developing more critical approaches to studying women's spaces, thus exposing those that are oppressive and creating new opportunities for truly emancipatory women's spaces that resist patriarchal oppression. The literary spaces I use for my inquiry are categorised and studied in separate

chapters in the order of largest to smallest scale: national spaces are followed by urban and

rural spaces, private-public places, domestic place and the body-as-place.

Scale plays an important role in analysing the representation of national space in

Lyrics Alley and *Swallow* in the first chapter, **National Femininities: Egypt, Nigeria and**

Sudan Writ Small. As national space is a pervasive context of smaller spaces, patriarchal

state power can penetrate into the smallest spaces and produce patriarchal femininities there.

As the reference to Susan Andrade's *The Nation Writ Small* in the title of the chapter

suggests, national space is multiscalar. It permeates cities, homes and other structures. In the

first chapter, I show how patriarchal women in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* use homosocial

space to control other women. As a point of departure, I situate the texts geographically by

exploring their global and continental locations. With the aid of Homi Bhabha, Timothy

Brennan, Frederic Jameson, and Obi Nwakanma, I explore the relationship between African

literature and Anglo-American literary criticism, as well as the category of "African

literature" as defined by its continental origin. Thereafter, I examine the interplay of gender

and the nation, with the aid of R. Rhadakrishnan, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, Elleke

Boehmer, and Nana Wilson-Tagoe. This is followed by the geo-historical contextualisation of

the literature, with specific reference to Egyptian, Sudanese and Nigerian national space. To

delineate the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian government's War Against Indiscipline, I rely

on the work of Carolyn Dennis. I then examine the construction of nationalist patriarchal

femininity in three sections. The first centres on the construction of national authority as male

authority, and how women use this authority to oppress other women. The second section

considers the representation of African nations in a global context, with the aid of Benedict

Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

Borrowing from Edward Said and Arjun Appadurai, I examine how Africa's characterisation

as a site of deprivation creates a need in some characters to emigrate for the sake of class
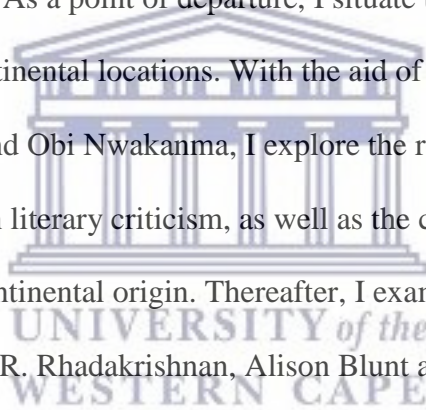
mobility. This drive is exploited by patriarchal women to further their own interests. The final section focuses on the construction and maintenance of national hegemonic femininities by patriarchal women. Through these lenses, I demonstrate how the patriarchal women characters in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* are produced by national space, and can also use national space to execute their oppression of other women.

Mobility is integral to the analysis of patriarchal femininities in the second chapter, **Reading Patriarchal Femininities in City and Rural Spaces**. Within their respective countries, cities and rural spaces form the next level of spatial organisation within which these texts are analysed. These spaces produce patriarchal women through nationalist as well as urban and rural patriarchal structures. In this chapter, I discuss the manifestation of urban entropic force as poverty and a lack of mobility. This creates competition among women, who are affected by entropy more than men are. The space thus produces patriarchal behaviour in women, and also offers itself as a tool for them to use in the oppression of one another. The chaotic forces that disempower women in African cities are examined with reference to the work of Abdoumaliq Simone and Chris Dunton. With the aid of Tim Cresswell, Dustin Crowley, Doreen Massey, Alexandra Ganser and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, I examine the intersection between gender and mobility, with particular emphasis on the road. In *Swallow*, competition for access to transport produces patriarchal behaviour in women in Tolani and Rose's urban context, and in Arike's rural context, her sister-in-law uses patriarchal norms to render her immobile. Grandmother Hakima similarly prevents women in *The Tent* from accessing transport by upholding the argument that mobility is a male right. Both Grandmother Hakima and Iya Segi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* use their unique access transport to amass more power as patriarchal women and increase their control over the immobile women. Nabilah exhibits similar behaviour in *Lyrics Alley* when she uses patriarchal national discourse to prevent Waheeba from travelling to London. In these
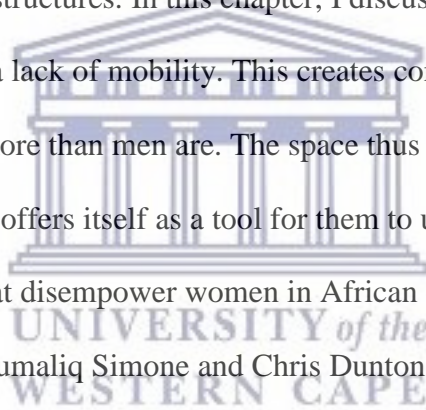
patriarchal contexts, mobility for women furthers patriarchal agendas rather than offering women liberation.

In the chapter **Private-Public Places and the Construction of Femininities,** I examine the construction of patriarchal femininities in places that are simultaneously private and public. The division between private and public space is challenged in the chapter itself with the aid of Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, Jürgen Habermas, Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Tally and Homi Bhabha, after which private-public spaces are conceptualised as public spaces in which private-sphere activities are conducted, as well as domestic spaces in which paid work is performed. I then use this theoretical foundation to examine the representation of patriarchal femininity in the hospital as private-public space in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, with reference to the work of Tally as well as Foucault's conception of heterotopic spaces in "Of Other Spaces". Thereafter, the hair salon in *Swallow* is discussed as a place that constructs patriarchal women that police one another's bodies through enforcing male ideas about female beauty. Both of these spaces produce patriarchal behaviour in women. I then examine the position of the domestic worker with reference to Iya Femi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* where her employer is a patriarchal woman produced by the private-public space, but also uses space to oppress Iya Femi. Lastly, with the aid of Colla, Fatima's imaginary desert space is discussed as a private-public space she utilises as a form of revolt against her patriarchal grandmother.

In the African contexts of this study, discussions of space are affected by religious and cultural difference to varying degrees, depending on what is foregrounded in the particular text. Where this becomes most relevant is in the fourth chapter, titled **Body and Brick: Patriarchs by Proxy in Domestic Places.** The homes in *Lyrics Alley*, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, *The Tent* and *Swallow* produce patriarchal femininities who also

tend to use the home space – and the body as an extension thereof – to exercise their power.

Blunt and Rose's work is again leveraged to introduce some nuance into the definition of

private space, and Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar and Jane Khatib-Chahidi offer

insight into the definitions of private and public space in Islamic cultures. For insight into the

representation of African nationalism in domestic spaces in African literature, I consult the

works of Grace Musila and Christopher Okonkwo. I also discuss the porous body as an

extension of the home through the work of Charles Taylor, James Krasner and Julia Kristeva.

An alternative bodily motif is also presented in the conception of the body as a microcosm of

the home – the most intimate, private space. Iya Segi's execution of her patriarchal power is

then studied through her control of the other women's bodies, in particular the damage she

causes to Segi, her daughter. Similarly, Rose's death in *Swallow,* and her attempted bodily

oppression of Tolani and her neighbour, is discussed as a result of her adoption of OC's

patriarchal agenda in *Swallow.* The female genital excisions that take place in *Lyrics Alley*

and *The Tent* are also examined as tools for patriarchal women to exercise control over other

women. In the second half of the fourth chapter, the ways boundaries are used in the spatial

execution of power are examined through Iya Segi and Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal

tendencies in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *The Tent.* By contrasting this with

Iya Segi's own spatial oppression by her mother in her youth, I also demonstrate that

patriarchal power is not only independent of a character's gender but can also shift between

characters depending on the spatial context.

Chapter 1: National Femininities: Egypt, Nigeria and Sudan Writ Small

Introduction

Of the four scales of space discussed in this study, national space – situated within its transnational and global contexts – is the largest. Using the largest space as a point of departure allows me to engage the macro-structures that permeate all the smaller spaces discussed in the rest of the thesis. African literatures[9], although vastly different by virtue of their disparate cultures and regions of origin, are primarily identified geographically as literature from continental Africa. Consequently, an examination of big space is fundamental to the study of African literature. In Susan Andrade's study *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms 1958 – 1988*, to which the title of this chapter alludes, Andrade argues that the narrative of African nationalism is overwhelmingly male. Women's stories are decentralised and disregarded, despite the fact that nationhood is inextricably connected with the domestic spaces within which women typically operate. Similarly, R. Radhakrishnan's "Nationalism, Gender and the Narrative of Identity" delineates national space in its outward manifestation as masculine, despite the fact that its inward composition sees women bear the burden of maintaining tradition and national culture. This chapter argues that national space, as a manifestation of male authority, creates a context that engenders patriarchal femininities.

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[9] Although there are many who reject the concept of "African literature" on the basis of a resistance to homogenisation, they are strongly opposed by those pan-Africanists who believe that an African literature is far more African than national literatures, as the latter are arbitrarily identified in accordance with colonial state lines.

These patriarchal women are shaped by and conform to the patriarchal systems of meaning that penetrate all spaces situated within the nation. In the fourth chapter, this multiscalar penetration of the national becomes evident in the discussion of how women's domestic spaces are preconfigured to host national space. Thus, patriarchal women are produced by national space, and in turn use national space to oppress other women. They do so either by perpetuating and enforcing a patriarchal nationalism, or through using the national space itself to further patriarchal agendas. This phenomenon is not exclusive to spaces controlled or accessed by men but is also prevalent in spaces that are homosocial or designated "women's spaces". In this chapter, I shall cast a critical eye on these women's national narratives to determine the circumstances under which they participate in the patriarchal metanarratives of the nation.

The texts chosen for the discussion of national space are Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2010) and Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2011). In these texts, the national spaces of Egypt, Sudan (written as a province of Egypt in the period the text is set) and Nigeria permeate city space as well as small places such as the home. Global and transnational spatial relations also emerge in *Lyrics Alley's* problematisation of the regional politics between Egypt and Sudan, and the ways the Nigerian characters in *Swallow* perceive their country as "other" to the Global North. The texts selected for this chapter thus present productive opportunities for engagement with national space in ways that the other novels studied in this thesis do not. Although Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) and Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1998) were also selected for study in this thesis, they are not applicable to this chapter. As themes of enclosure and immobility feature strongly in these narratives, they are largely set within the confines of domestic and public-private places. Although the national permeates these spaces as well, the national is not as obviously foregrounded in the small spaces presented in the latter two novels. As *Lyrics Alley* is set in Egypt and Sudan, and

Swallow is set in Nigeria, these countries and their fictional geographies shape the context of this study of national space.

As a point of departure, the concept of "African literature" will be examined in its relation to the Western scholarly tradition. As this inquiry evokes notions of the postcolonial, the intersections of this study with postcolonial approaches will also be mapped, followed by an exploration of gendered conceptions of the nation. The foundational texts in the construction of this theoretical paradigm are selected works of Homi Bhabha, Elleke Boehmer, Simon Gikandi, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Obioma Nnaemeka. With a view through the geo-textual contexts of Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria, my analysis of patriarchal women and their participation in an oppressive nationalist project will centre on three key themes. The first, examined with the theoretical works of Arjun Appadurai, Edward Said, Robert Tally and Immanuel Wallerstein, is the construction of African national space as the primitive other to the Global North. This definition of national space in terms of "lack" or deprivation encourages the proclivities of patriarchal women who offer connections with the Global North. The second theme is the representation of masculine state authority in state institutions such as houses of finance like the bank, and how patriarchal women leverage this space of power to oppress other women. The third theme is the maintenance of essentialist and patriarchal geo-ethnic feminine identities within the national space. This hegemonic womanhood, discussed with reference to the work of R.W. Connell and R. Radhakrishnan, is designed to serve the local patriarchal order. Through these three approaches to patriarchal national space, I shall demonstrate how patriarchal women are produced by national space and can use national space to exploit other women.

Marking Boundaries: Studying the Postcolonial Nation in Literature

Reading national space is necessarily a reading "in-relation-to". Nations are defined in terms of their sovereign identities and their non-interference in one another's domestic affairs. A study of nations therefore implies a study of the networks that connect and separate them in the larger context of the world.[10] In "The World and the Postcolonial", Elleke Boehmer compares two theoretical frameworks used to study literature from the Global South: postcolonial literary theory, and world literary theory. Boehmer notes that these theoretical approaches have become conflated due to a perceived similarity in their object of study, namely, literature that is not from the West. According to Boehmer, in the context of postcolonial literature, "the world" is often read alongside, supplanting or synonymous with "the postcolonial" (299). This is likely a result of the following logic: "the West" is the exclusive centre, and "the world" is a larger term that also includes the margin. However, the rule of Western cultural norms has become so pervasive that "world" has begun to denote "the rest of the world (that is not the West)" – it no longer *includes* the margin, but *is* the margin. Transnational space is divided into "the West" and "the rest", and "postcolonial" has become synonymous with simply meaning "not the West". Boehmer cautions against this reductive approach in the realm of literary criticism, as studies of world literature largely comprise a form of comparativism and cultural translation, whereas postcolonial studies focus on "political and geo-historical questions – who has a voice, whose land is this" (302). As these are disparate agendas, these theoretical approaches cannot be conflated.

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[10] As discussed shortly, this is the underlying principle of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis. See *The Modern World-System*.

As my study is a spatial one, and avoids comparative paradigms, my theoretical approach is influenced primarily by the work of postcolonial theorists. However, to claim that my project qualifies as a postcolonial inquiry would be over-determination, as its thematic scope does not align entirely with that of postcolonial literary criticism. As Boehmer points out, the postcolonial motif does not contain apolitical foci (306). Although one cannot and should not erase the colonial legacy from the study of a postcolonial text, my focal questions in this thesis do not centre on historicity and the power imbalances caused by the colonial project. I study power primarily through its construction of and by space, and its exercise in terms of gender, bearing in mind, however, that colonisation impacted on gender politics. Where I depart from the conventions of postcolonial inquiry, thus, is that I am not directly studying the impact of colonisation or the postcolonial articulations of capitalist modernity, but focussing on the spatial production of gender hierarchies. I am, however, engaging with literature set within postcolonial national spaces, which were constructed and are still maintained by the processes of colonisation and capitalist modernity. It is necessary that I use the work of postcolonial literary theorists to explore the countries represented in these texts as the postcolonial nation-states they are, but I do not presume to call my study a postcolonial one, as my study foregrounds nuances outside of postcolonial inquiry. One focus that my thesis does share with postcolonial studies, however, is an interest in the colonial construction of borders in Africa.

Although the modern African nation-state is largely a consequence of colonial intervention, the violence of this imposition on African soil lies not in the concept of borders itself, but in how these borders were established and enforced. As Augustine Asaah argues in "Pan-Africanism, Inter-African Migration and the Crisis of National Integration in the African Novel", the notion of African borders is not inherently problematic:

Villages, towns, kingdoms and empires had and still have some idea of

their boundaries. This notwithstanding, the fact that wars and conflicts

frequently erupted between rulers, communities and individuals over the limits

of their terrain, property and estates not only in the name of greed or

expansionism but also by reason of the imprecision of demarcations is

eloquent proof that, in Africa as elsewhere, borders have never been immune

from dislocation, rift and nebulousness. (4)

As borders have always formed part of African spatial processes, the crux of studying

national space is in the particularities of borders and the nature of the processes by which

they are maintained. When the countries in question are postcolonial nation-states, the history

and legitimacy of the borders at issue are already problematised along with the socio-political

structures that uphold them. This is evident in, for example, Aboulela's map of the Sudanese

journey to independence in *Lyrics Alley*, where the nature of the border between Sudan and

Egypt is constantly questioned and redefined in terms of sociocultural, economic and political

relations. Similarly, the character of Egyptian national space undergoes redefinition in the

text, as at this time – in the 1950s – Egypt was still a British territory. In "Mapping the

Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative", Harry

Garuba notes that "colonialism as a regime of power was largely organised through spatiality

and subjectivity: spaces to capture, subjects to control" (87). As discussed in the introductory

chapter, this capturing occurred through mapping and categorisation, which encamped

territories, tribes and subjects within European epistemologies. With the popularisation of

postcolonial literature, the study of texts of African origin by the Global North has become a

point of contention. Essentially, the controversy centres on two arguments: that the West

cannot interpret what it cannot experience – or at least, cannot interpret it very well – and that

the West imposes Eurocentric readings upon postcolonial texts. The former argument

assumes that culture is untranslatable, a position which, as discussed in the introductory

chapter, is a product of modernity's violent categorisation of the socio-spatial in a process of

othering. This perspective has been eroded in the latter part of the twentieth century. The

second argument – the imposition of Eurocentric paradigms on African literatures as a

continued, clandestine form of othering – has become dominant.

Even Frederic Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational

Capital," an impassioned argument for the disruption of the Anglocentric literary canon and

its reconstruction as a map of world literatures, slips into Eurocentric othering. As Aijaz

Ahmad points out in his response, Jameson not only constructs the "capitalist first world" and

a "presumably pre- or non-capitalist third world" as binary opposites, but also reduces all

third-world texts to national allegories with the supposition that they are irreconcilable with

American postmodernism (Ahmad 7-8). This assertion constructs nationalism and

postmodernism as a binary, which is problematic in its own right, but also reduces to a single

unit a multiplicity of nationalisms that are compatible with postmodernism to varying degrees

(8). Ahmad also opposes Jameson's descriptions of the first and second worlds in terms of

their systems of production and capital, but the third world in terms of its relationship with

the first world. For Ahmad, this is the root of Jameson's reductionist argument:

> For, if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by
>
> relations of intra-national domination; if they are forever suspended outside
>
> the sphere of conflict between capitalism (first world) and socialism (second
>
> world); if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and
>
> class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class,
>
> gender, nation, race, region and so on, but the unitary "experience" of national

oppression (if one is merely the object of history, the Hegelian slave) then
what else can one narrate but that national oppression? Politically, we are
Calibans, all. Formally, we are fated to be in the poststructuralist world of
repetition with difference; the same allegory, the nationalist one, re-written,
over and over again, until the end of time. (9)

By defining the so-called third world and its aesthetic in relation to – and indeed
determined by – the first world, Jameson is once again emptying out Africa, removing its
names and particularities to return it to its Conradian form. The Africa that emerges from
within this Eurocentric paradigm bears a strong resemblance to the Western image of the
Orient in Edward Said's *Orientalism* – it has no substance of its own, only the capacity to
mirror its creator. Ahmad's powerful depiction of the third world as Shakespeare's Caliban
evokes Bhabha and Nnaemeka's shared argument that the postcolonial site has replaced the
colonial site as the other to Anglo-American epistemologies, a cycle that Ahmad sees iterated
indefinitely. Partha Chatterjee and R. Radhakrishnan also address the establishment of a
postcolonial national identity that is not dependent on an inside/outside logic which defines
the "third-world nation" by contrasting it with the West. Building on Chatterjee's reading of
nationalist discourses in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative
Discourse*, Radhakrishnan argues that the "postcolonial project and its many narratives are
still in search of a different political ethic […] that is underwritten neither by the Western
subject of Enlightenment nor by a reactionary and essentialist nativism" (85). For
Radhakrishnan, the "nationalist subject" thus "straddles two regions or spaces" where
Western epistemological modes need to be internalised for pragmatic reasons while
maintaining an inner traditional identity (85). The gendered nature of these two spaces or
discourses will be discussed at a later stage.

In "Urban Spaces, Women's Places: Polygamy as sign in Mariama Bâ's Novels",
Nnaemeka offers an illustrative example of how a Eurocentric paradigm such as Jameson's
can level and reconstruct Africa as an other. In this essay, Nnaemeka dissects Western
scholarship's treatment of polygamy in African literature. Using readings of Mariama Bâ's
novels produced by Western feminist scholarship, Nnaemeka argues that Western feminism
often demonises African cultural practices as patriarchal in ways that assume that the African
women in these narratives are incapable of agency. The trajectories of their lives are read as
having been inflicted upon them rather than steered by them, which, in combination with
insufficient understanding of the relevant geo-cultural contexts, can result in misreadings.
Nnaemeka writes: "This casting of African women is not surprising in view of the fact that
imperialist discourses invent targets and causes without which their *raison d'etre* will be in
jeopardy. […] Imperial (re)inventions of African customs as stigma and dilemma will not let
African customs die because if they do, the basis for the insidious 'othering' of Africa will be
further eroded" (167-168). [11] Nnaemeka suggests that imperialist, Eurocentric discourse has
elided itself to become a false form of neutrality, and that the academy's perpetuation of
Eurocentric discourse is obscuring its inherent bias. From within the paradigm of Western
scholarship, the othering of Africa to legitimise the continuation of Eurocentric literary
criticism has thus become all the more difficult to recognise. In a review of Nnaemeka's
article, Opportune Zongo calls this lack of engagement with African contexts and criticisms a
case of "simplistic, arrogant, irrelevant theoretical wanderings into African literary texts"
(181). The primary caution here is against engaging with African literary texts without also

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[11] Peter Hitchcock raises similar concerns in "The Eye and the Other: The Gaze and
the Look in Egyptian Feminist Fiction".

engaging with the necessary contextual and critical materials that will allow a scholar writing

from within Western literary criticism to read these texts within their relevant epistemological

and ontological paradigms.

The question of what constitutes an appropriate paradigm is addressed by Homi

Bhabha in "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the

Trials of Cultural Translation", which centres on a discussion of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of

Darkness* and Frederic Jameson's "Secondary Elaborations". He articulates his criticism of

Eurocentric readings that emerge from the metropolitan site, stating that reading the "global"

at the metropolitan site cannot escape the "anxiety" of the West needing a "wilderness"

against which to construct itself as rational and civilised (113). Bhabha asserts the need for a

third space from which to consider the Global South, since the paradigm of its contrariness to

the Global North cannot be escaped. The postcolonial site replaces the colonial site in this

"daemonic doubling" (113) which results in readings of African literature that fixate on

injustice, suffering, passivity, inequality and ineptitude purely by virtue of Africa's otherness

– as demonstrated by Nnaemeka in her study of scholarly assumptions about polygamy.

Bhabha further introduces a question that follows on Nnaemeka's: after the first doubling

occurs in the construction of the African subject as the other, what happens to the European

subject doing the othering? That subject re-emerges in its own context with the shadow of the

other, which continues to affirm the subject's identity as the rational, civilised man. Even in

the absence of his constructed African other, the European subject remains defined by this

other, and reproduces his culture in answer to his African counterpart.

Bhabha's answer to "travelling theory" (113) is a distrust of abstraction. Rather than

reading African narratives from within the discourse of Western scholarship, the metropolitan

site itself – at which Western scholarship originates – must also be destabilised. This differs

from Nnaemeka's approach; instead of more African context and scholarship being incorporated into the scholarly paradigm, the idea of a singular paradigm itself is disrupted. Thus, instead of building a stable framework for reading African texts, Bhabha discredits the idea of a stable framework:

> These subjects of study require the experience of anxiety to be incorporated into the analytic construction of the object of critical attention: narratives of the borderline conditions of cultures and disciplines. For anxiety is the affective address of "a world [that] reveals itself as caught up in the space between frames; a doubled frame or one that is split", as Samuel Weber describes the symbolic structure of psychic anxiety itself. ("Newness" 213-214)

Using a single, "global" paradigm necessitates abstraction, as any attempt to distance the narrative from the locality that gave rise to it will to some degree require its essentialisation (214). For Bhabha, the concept of anxiety embodies an acceptance of tension between paradigms, rather than an attempt to resolve this tension through abstraction. In practise, this requires parallel readings of contexts – the same city is at once African and Western, global and local – it is in the negotiation among these paradigms of meaning that the possibility of an inclusive reading emerges.

Simon Gikandi offers a similar perspective in his mapping of this dual influence. He posits that, as Eurocentric discourse is constructed out of a dialectic between the centre and the periphery, it is already infused with the language of the other:

The truth is, colonial and other peripheries have played a greater

theoretical role in the constitution of imperial centers than previously thought;

and contrary to popular wisdom in marginality studies, the relation between

imperial centers and colonial peripheries was a two-way process […] The

forms of appropriation and the claims to cultural property involved here are

certainly more complex than my formulation suggests; what is important to

keep in mind, however, is the ambiguous ways in which margins and centers

are conflated or blurred, the process of fusion and elision that brings them

together and also separates them. ("Introduction" 4-5)

For Gikandi, the concept of "European" is always internally othered as it has been

significantly shaped by forces extrinsic to itself. However, attempting to deconstruct the

binary of Africa and the West is not an attempt to erase the differences between them. As

Gikandi states, the dialectical processes that created and conjoined these discourses also

reinforced their differences. In *Lyrics Alley*, this dual influence is evident in the Abuzeid

home as the contact space between Nabilah and Waheeba, who are representatives of North

Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt and Sudan as African countries are also explored in

relation to the Global North when Mahmoud takes his son to England in the hopes of

securing him the best medical care that Western science can offer. Mahmoud also uses this

visit as an opportunity to make business connections in London, in order to further the

Sudanese economic influence on England. In my readings of national space, the spectre of

colonial rule will be considered as more than the sum of its visible effects. Instead, it is

studied as a dynamic relationship of dual influence between the Global North and the national

spaces represented in these novels. Although Gikandi and Bhabha's approaches have their

benefits, it should be noted that the centre still holds epistemological power over the

periphery. In *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, Ngũgĩ observes that

the production of knowledge and capital is still overwhelmingly located in the Global North;

epistemological and economic wealth still accumulates there despite the complexity of dual

influence (43-44). The centre or "outside" therefore still dominates Africa.[12] It remains useful

to consider the spaces in these texts to be multiscalar in that they are simultaneously

produced and maintained by global and African structures, but the prevailing dominance of

Western epistemology and capital cannot be disregarded. This power imbalance can be

observed in *Swallow,* where, although Nigeria and Britain share an intertwined colonial

history, characters such as Rose remain desperate to escape Nigeria and move to the locus of

economic power – in this case, London. This will be further explored later with reference to

the work of Appadurai and Wallerstein.

Geo-Textual Contexts: *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow*

Sudan is positioned directly below Egypt, and only one country – Chad – separates

Sudan from Nigeria on the western coast. Despite this proximity, these countries are all

considered to form part of different continental regions; Nigeria is a West African state, while

Egypt is North African, and Sudan is located in the Sahel. Politically, the 1980s Nigeria of

Swallow is a maturing postcolonial nation-state, whereas the Egypt of *Lyrics Alley* is still

under British rule in the 1950s, and Sudan is an Anglo-Egyptian province struggling for

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[12] In his book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*,

Partha Chatterjee also addresses this question of inherited epistemologies in terms of the

continuing production of subjects of Eurocentric Enlightenment in postcolonial nation-states.

Edward Said also covers the topic in *Culture and Imperialism*.

independence. Therefore, despite the fact that they span the same latitudinal swathe of the African continent and have some shared socio-spatial dynamics, the national spaces in these texts have disparate transnational contexts. Whereas Nigeria in *Swallow* is keeping a covetous eye on the Global North and becoming increasingly entrenched in global capitalist modernity, Sudan in *Lyrics Alley* is striving to find its identity and separate from Egypt – the regional version of the Global North.

Primarily, Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* is set in two spaces: the cities of Umdurman in Sudan, and Cairo in Egypt. The narratives centre on the household of patriarch Mahmoud Abuzeid, also known as Mahmoud Bey. Mahmoud is a Sudanese business leader and socialite with a strong desire to grow his country and propel it into the future. His first wife, Waheeba, is the mother of his two eldest children, Nassir and Nur, and represents Sudanese culture and tradition. His second wife, Nabilah, is the mother of his two younger children, Farouk and Ferial, and represents Egyptian culture and a globalised, Anglo-American modernity. Also key to the novel is Mahmoud's brother Idris Abuzeid, whose two daughters Fatma and Soraya are integral to Mahmoud's household. The greater part of the interactions between these characters takes place within the Abuzeid *saraya* (palace) in Umdurman, where each of Mahmoud's wives has her own wing of the home. The family, with the exception of Waheeba and some of her household, also travels to Alexandria, where Nur studies, and Cairo, to which Nabilah returns each summer. The action centres on Nabilah and Waheeba's relationship, as well as an accident suffered by Nur in Alexandria, which results in his being paralysed from the neck down. Nur's accident has an enormous impact on his betrothed, Soraya, who has to develop a new identity when she learns she is no longer going to marry Nur as she had always believed.
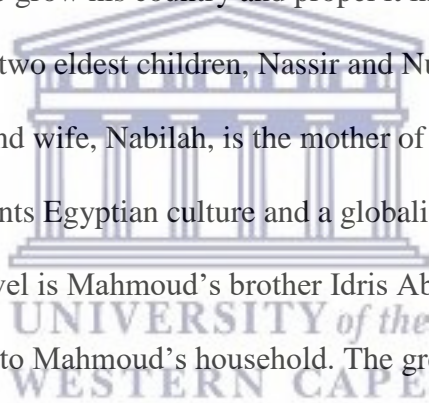
Lyrics Alley explores the complexities of regional relationships in the Sahel, which is the transitional space between the Sahara and the Sudanese Savanna. The Sahel derives its name from the Arabic ساحل (*sāḥil)*, which refers to a figurative "coast" – in this case, the edge of the Sahara. Sudan forms a central part of this belt, and gradually gives way to the Egyptian terrain to the north. This adds a climatic and regional nuance to the Sudanese struggle for independence from Egypt. Aboulela presents the Sahel as a contact space between different cultures and religions, where they influence and challenge one another directly. This counters the longstanding tradition of representing the Sahel as a physical border that manifests the separation of Arab-Islamic North Africa from the rest of Africa.[13] Cameroonian author Simon Njami summarises the fallacy of this separation in "Chaos and Metamorphosis": "This kind of revisionism, eager to set the 'Ethiopian' fraction against the 'Mediterranean' fraction of a continent across which the desert opens up like an interminable parenthesis, is pathological, for it seeks to negate the multiple influences fuelled by exchanges between the large Sahelian cities and their North African neighbours since the Middle Ages" (13). This supposed cultural isolation is reminiscent of the modernist epistemological and cartographical practice – as discussed in the introductory chapter – of categorising and separating spaces and cultures.

Aboulela's discourse of intersection enters the novel spatially in the merged household, as well as in the question of Sudan's independence from Egypt. Her portrayal of this contact space is not utopian, but acknowledges the complexities of regional politics in the

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[13] An example of this symbolism can be found in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال).

conflict between Nabilah and Waheeba. Although Egypt's journey to independence started

earlier than many colonised African states, total independence was only achieved in 1954,

around the same time as many other colonies. Egypt was an Ottoman colony until 1882

(Goldschmidt 49), after which it had a brief period of independence before falling to the

British Empire (84). From the political themes it is clear that *Lyrics Alley* is set during the

mid-1950s. This is the period during which Sudan was breaking away from Egyptian rule,

and Egypt was gaining independence from Britain (Collins 33). South Sudan only gained

further independence from North Sudan (now known as the Republic of Sudan) in 2011.

Although Aboulela's narrative writes cultures into contact with each other in *Lyrics Alley,* it

should not be read as a call for nationalist unification. In fact, the reader may empathise with

the Abuzeid household's pride in Sudan and their yearning for independence from Egypt. The

textual space does, however, highlight that sovereignty does not imply isolation – the

Sudanese and Egyptian cultures and economies remain intertwined.

Although Aboulela problematises the separation of Arab-Islamic North Africa from

the rest of the continent, the subject of religious difference is subsumed into questions of

ethnography and nationality. This is a significant political positioning, as religion forms an

important part of the perceived separatism of Arab-Islamic North Africa. Instead, Aboulela

presents religion as a lens through which to consider a national space, rather than as an

inherently divisive or unifying mechanism. This is contrary to some of her other work, in

which Islam can be presented as a liberating force.[14] In *Lyrics Alley,* religion only functions

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[14] In "Leila Aboulela, Religion, and the Challenge of the Novel", Sadia Abbas

discusses the political significance of how Aboulela, through the character Rae in *The*

to underscore the ways Sudan has resisted the negative consequences of modernisation. Ustaz Badr, who is Nur's literature and theological tutor, notes that "in Sudan, the barriers between the human and spirit worlds [are] thin, or that there [are] cracks and transparencies through which that other, unknown world could, at times, be sensed" (Aboulela 60). Islam therefore serves as a paradigm through which the reader comes to appreciate the magic of Sudan – its connections to tradition and an older world. Aboulela sets this scene even more effectively by staging most of the action in the text in Umdurman, which is better known as Omdurman. The spelling that Aboulela uses is truer to the Arabic origin of the city's name, أم درمان (*Umm Durmān*) – a name it acquired from Darfur traders who associated the place with a female food seller they knew as the "mother of Abdurahman" (El-Tom 98). It is the second largest city in Sudan. It is located in North Sudan and is divided from the capital, Khartoum, by the Nile. Through the eyes of the devout Ustaz Badr, Aboulela writes the space as mythical and full of promise. The mystic quality of Sudan is also noted by Nabilah, who strongly prefers the bustling city of Cairo, with its early adoption of a globalised modernity.

Similar to the Cairo of *Lyrics Alley,* the Lagos of *Swallow* is a vast metropolis teeming with the promise of global capital. The text centres on the lives of Tolani and Rose, two friends who live and work together, and struggle against an unabating tide of ill fortune and worsening poverty. When Rose is dismissed from her position as a bank manager's


Translator, writes Islamic belief systems and authority back into the narratives of Africa as a positive liberal force that can offer "superior forms of anti-colonial redress," and, through practices of dividing generational wealth, resists the capitalist accumulation of wealth (443-444).

secretary, Tolani is promoted to take her position, but finds herself contending with a

sexually abusive superior. Struggling to make ends meet, Rose encounters a man named OC

while she is admiring shoes at the market. OC purchases the shoes for Rose, and later offers

both Rose and Tolani financial relief in exchange for their services as narcotics smugglers.

Rose instructs Tolani on how to swallow condoms filled with cocaine in order to transport

cocaine to England without detection. Tolani does not succeed in swallowing the drug, but

Rose does, and dies at the airport when the condom ruptures. Tolani, separated from her

fiancé and grieving the death of her friend, goes to stay with her mother in her childhood

village to recover.

As the text is set in Lagos, many readers of African literature will recognise the city

from its frequent representation in recent works of fiction. Nigeria is one of the African

countries that has benefited the most from a consistent literary engagement with its colonial

past and postcolonial present. Obi Nwakanma defines Nigeria as an "unstable and ambivalent

domain of affiliation or belonging, a relationship modulated by the slippages in the meaning

of nation" (2). In *A History of Nigeria*, Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton trace the history

of continental and foreign influences on Nigerian national development. The geography of

the Nigerian nation-state was delineated arbitrarily[15]; the only geo-physical boundary of the

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[15] The Nigerian borders were drawn in the late nineteenth century "by Europeans,

during the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 and in line with other mutual agreements between the

United Kingdom, France, and Germany, as part of the colonisation of West Africa" (Falola

and Heaton 244).

country is the Atlantic Ocean, and the landscape is inhabited by "hundreds of ethnic groups, many of which straddle these arbitrary borders" (Falola and Heaton 17). Modern Nigeria emerged from the British defeat and territorialisation of various areas in the latter half of the nineteenth century (85). These include the area now known as the Northern region, the Yoruba states and Lagos in the southwest, the Niger Delta, Calabar and the surrounding areas in the southeast, as well as the territories around the Niger and Benue rivers (85). Nigerian colonialism was unique in that the Nigerian middle class that emerged from British cultural conditioning was extensive, and the impact of this continues to be seen in the valorisation of Western culture in Nigeria today (128). Following independence in 1960, Nigeria was plagued by civil war from 1967 to 1970, after which various military dictatorships seized power until the advent of Nigeria's stable democracy in 1999 (156, 242). For Nwakanma, this troubled postcolonial history is a search for a national identity that could make sense of the incoherent landscape (2). Consequently, texts that engage with the Nigerian landscape interrogate the systems of meaning it produces, and "attempt to apprehend the historical forces that have confluenced to shape, and continue to shape the idea of Nigeria as a product of modernity, and its inheritance of the conditions of postcoloniality" (2). In *Swallow,* the tension between such systems of meaning reveals itself in prejudices based on ethnicity, such as Tolani's superior at the bank's assumption that she must be unsophisticated due to being from a small town situated toward the interior of Nigeria. In a transnational paradigm, this is also evident in the value that characters such as Rose, Violet and Chief Odunsi's wife (Chief Odunsi is the uncle of Tolani's fiancé, Sanwo) place in Anglo-American culture, and their subsequent rejection of Nigeria.
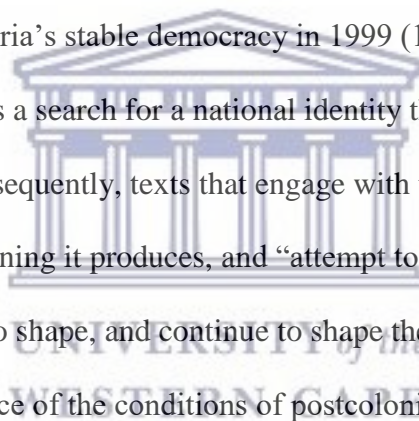
Women's Stories and the Postcolonial Nation-State

In the context of African literature, the term "nation" bears traces of colonial and postcolonial causata. Although Jameson's assertion that the "third-world text" is necessarily national allegory is reductionist, it is true that questions of national identity permeate much postcolonial writing. As Timothy Brennan notes in "The National Longing for Form", the postcolonial novel is constructed around an "obsessive nation-centeredness" in that the nation and its realities are often interrogated in the foreground of the narrative (64). Nwakanma echoes this observation, noting that "[t]he postcolonial novel formalises the search for, and maintenance of, the idea and meaning of the nation in postcolonial culture" (2). Nwakanma also observes that, for Brennan as well as Bhabha, a nation comprises the coalescence of experiences and metaphors in spaces of interaction. The national is not studied as a superset of the local, nor placed alongside the local, but rather read through the local at scale. These smaller spaces can be within the nation in question, or outside of it. My focus is on such multiscalar manifestations of national space that produce patriarchal women, and enable women to oppress other women.
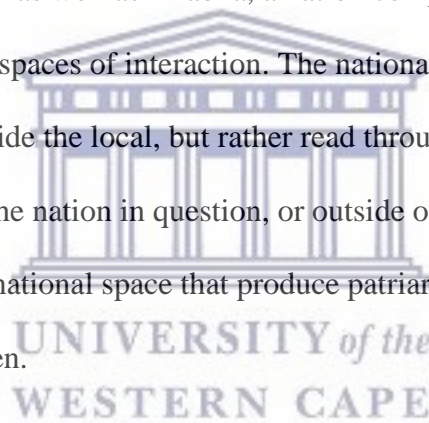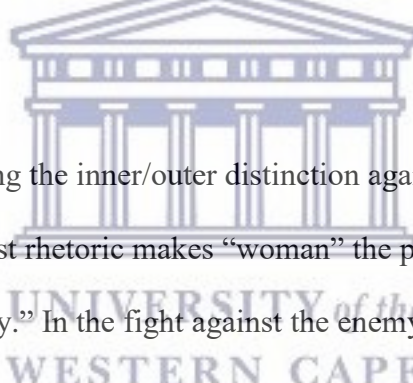
As mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, the nation is written in turn as either male or female, depending on the context of its portrayal. In "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question", Partha Chatterjee reads the intersection between gender and national identity through the lens of the gendered division between the public and private spheres, which he discusses as "the world" and "the home" (233). Where the nation is gendered male in political, economic and other "worldly" discourses, the "interior" nation – the place of home, belonging and cohesion – is gendered female:

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home

represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a

treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical

considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male.

The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of

the material word – and woman is its representation. (233)

Although this is a familiar trope in colonial narratives, where the nation-as-female

was internally conquered and externally defended by male imperialists (Blunt and Rose 10;

Garuba, "Mapping" 87), Chatterjee also sees this as characteristic of postcolonial nation-

states in their search for identity after and against colonialism. In problematising the

relationship between feminist and nationalist projects, Radhakrishnan builds on Chatterjee's

argument to articulate further how this gendering of postcolonial national space produces

patriarchal systems:

[B]y mobilizing the inner/outer distinction against the "outerness"

of the West, nationalist rhetoric makes "woman" the pure and ahistorical

signifier of "interiority." In the fight against the enemy from the outside,

something within gets even more repressed and "woman" becomes the

mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist

history. (84)

Women are therefore not only the literal reproducers of culture as "bearer[s] of the

nation's children" (Wilson-Tagoe 4), but also function as the signifiers of national identity –

the "home: or "inside" defended by male political discourse against the "outside" world.

Consequently, where the nation is represented as feminine, nationalism is the language of

oppression in colonial or postcolonial sites. Elleke Boehmer in *Stories of Women: Gender

and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* echoes Radhakrishnan and Chatterjee. She argues

that the "iconography", "administrative structures" and "politics" of the postcolonial nation

render it a "male-constructed space" where women usually function as "symbols or totems, as

the bearers of tradition" (22).[16] Garuba argues that this troping is complicit in a "biologism"

that presents identity as "pre-given and organic, flowing seamlessly from its origin in a body

and a land in which are also enwombed a nation and a culture" ("Mapping" 107). In the

struggle for an independent identity that is neither "nativist" nor "Western" in the new

postcolonial nation-state, women remain the reproducers of the status quo, and the audience

of history.

Given the patriarchal character of nationalist discourse, postcolonial women writers

face immense challenges in making their stories heard. In *The Nation Writ Small,* her study of

nationalism in the works of African women writers published between 1958 and 1988,

Andrade illuminates a resistance and "writing back" to patriarchal nationalism and the nation

as represented by male African writers. Andrade argues that, whereas men engage the large

narratives of economic and legal concerns in their writing, women's histories and

participation in nation-building is elided. For Andrade, "novels written by women [in this

period] converge around the sphere of the familial as the orchestrating unit that looms over

and plays out national dramas" (Andrade 34). As Annie Gagiano has noted, one might object

to Andrade's perpetuation of a gender binary here, but her argument nevertheless produces

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[16] This is also a dimension of Naomi Nkealah's argument in her discussion of

problematic representations of women in Anglophone Cameroonian drama in "Women as

Absented Presences: Gender and Nationalist Discourse in Bole Butake's 'Shoes and Four

Men in Arms'".

interesting readings (462). Boehmer similarly notes that many postcolonial women writers have "questioned, cut across, upended or refused entirely the dominant if not dominatory narrative of the independent nation," and "placed their own subjectivities, sexualities, maternal duties, private stories and intimate pleasures in tension with conventional roles transmitted by national and other traditional narratives" (*Stories of Women* 6). Boehmer explores these literatures in her article "Beside the West: Postcolonial Women Writers, the Nation and the Globalised World," arguing that women authors "have been hard-pressed to write a space for themselves either within or even on the margins of the postcolonial nation" (173). Despite these challenges, women authors produce texts that critique the nation from within multiple spaces and places: "However, by engaging with their condition as women *vis-à-vis* that nation, or in relation to a nationally circumscribed space, these writers have succeeded even so in addressing issues of belonging that have *both* national *and* trans-local resonances, on occasion establishing cross-border affiliations as they proceed" (*Beside the West* 173). Therefore, although women's nationalisms may at times be insular and excluded from the patriarchal structures of transnational engagement, they can nevertheless be read at scale in small space where they engage both internal and external national issues with nuance and sensitivity.

Due to the difficulty women writers face in participating in the central narrative that shapes the nation, a prudent methodology is to read national space through women's narratives in the smaller spaces and interactions that comprise the nation. For example, in *Lyrics Alley*, the complexities of Anglo-Egyptian and Sudanese transnational dynamics – between themselves and the Global North alike – are represented on a smaller scale in the Abuzeid home, where the wives that share the space represent the disparate national identities. The range of voices and identities is wider, which counters the homogenising tendencies of studies that engage with national culture at a wider scale. This approach also

allows for concrete engagement with the national space as it is distilled within the parts that make up its whole. Boehmer goes on to argue that being excluded from the central postcolonial narrative has compelled women writers to create numerous counter-narratives as a "fictional revision of the different axes of the postindependence social imaginary" (176). As a consequence of their exclusion, they are able to influence the hegemony by reshaping it from within. Their rejection of the "conventional national allegory" is nonetheless still a form of nation-building in that they have a "shared concern to rework the national space from their own particular political and ethical perspectives as women" (176). In *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow,* places such as the bank, the home and the body reveal how the patriarchal power of the nation, too, is translated to these smaller and sometimes intimate spheres. In these small spaces penetrated by the national context, patriarchal women are produced, who may also use space to oppress other women. One way in which they may use space to exercise patriarchal power is by exploiting other women's desires to access the Global North, which represents social prestige and financial relief.

Extroverted Vistas: The Call of the Global North in *Swallow* and *Lyrics Alley*

In the context of postcolonial or so-called "third-world" nations, women's peripheral positions within their patriarchal states are exacerbated by their further marginalised position in the transnational context. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Immanuel Wallerstein traces the transnational flows of capitalism in *The Modern World-System,* where he categorises nations as core, semi-peripheral or peripheral in accordance with their "complexity of economic activities, strength of the state machinery, cultural integrity, etc."

(349).[17] In *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow,* the Global North takes various physical and ideal shapes, but consistently functions as the locus of an imagined prosperous future or alternate life. In *Swallow,* Nigeria's relationship with the Global North manifests in the motif of expatriation. Although there is a clear need for improvements in infrastructure and service delivery, in Rose and Tolani's story, the Nigerian government responds to this need by shifting the responsibility to its citizens. The state authority disseminates this mandate across national space with the use of television advertisements:
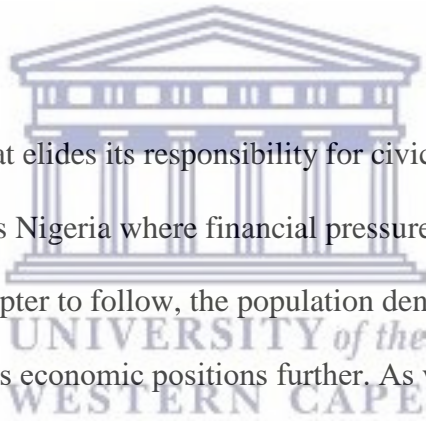
> In this advert, Andrew, a Nigerian who just arrived from the United States, complained about life in Nigeria. "No water, no light," he said. "I'm checking out." The voice-over followed like a fed up father, "ANDREW. Nigeria is OUR country. Let us STAY and salvage it TOGETHER." A jingle ended the advert, "Save Nigeria today…" "Andrew" had become the national nickname for Nigerians who lived overseas. They were not good citizens like those of us who stayed and suffered. (Atta 58)
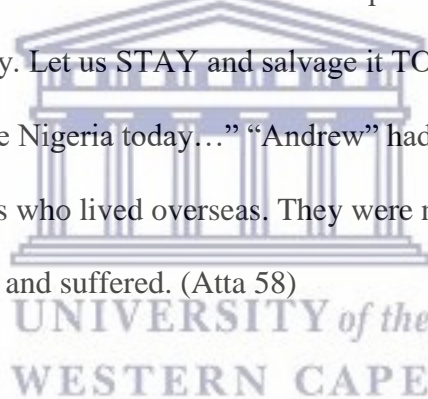
The authority in the advert is male, and reminiscent of a "fed up father". Tolani and Rose's patriarchal state mirrors their biological fathers, who are equally disappointing in their oppression and marginalisation of women. In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism,* he characterises nations as "imagined communities" held together by a common administrative language and its reproduction in

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[17] Subsequently, these transnational systems were similarly mapped and interrogated by Lila Abu-Lughod, Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Arjun Appadurai and Andre Gunder Frank, among others.

media (46). For Boehmer, this is fundamental to what makes literature so important in the study of nationalism – because "narrative, like metaphor, can be said to have a discursive materiality; therefore the *story* of the nation permits the forging and testing of particular kinds of affiliation to a national community" (*Stories of Women* 11).[18] In *Swallow,* this form of national affiliation is suggested by the fact that Rose and Tolani, who are from different geo-ethnic backgrounds, recite the advertisements together when they appear on television (Atta 48). It is clear from the advert that citizens are obligated to remain within the borders to "salvage" and "save" Nigeria. As Tolani notes bitterly, being a good citizen entails staying and suffering the state's neglect. This imagined community is patriarchal and damaging and does not prevent the women – Rose in particular – from wanting to emigrate in search of a better life.

A national authority that elides its responsibility for civic order is particularly destructive in a country such as Nigeria where financial pressure is a reality for most citizens. As will be discussed in the chapter to follow, the population density of urban contexts exacerbates citizens' precarious economic positions further. As women are already more disadvantaged in this patriarchal system than men are, they may choose to leverage this system to further their own ends. Rose's sister Violet, for example, submits herself to

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[18] This is similar to Bhabha's description of nationhood in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" as a "textual affiliation" comprised of "complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and literary narratives" (292).

prostitution and exploitation. Rose, too, considers her poverty to be a result of living in Nigeria, and experiences this poverty as a greater source of shame than being willingly objectified and exploited as Violet is:

> Being poor is what you should be ashamed of. See Violet? Everyone knows what Violet was doing in Rome. Now she's back home with a hair salon. No one can tell Violet she was not studying Italian in Italy. Our heads of state steal, our board of directors steals. Who asks where their money comes from? People praise them. They run after them and beg them to spread some of their wealth. I am tired of being poor. Every day is a struggle with this War Against Indiscipline and austerity measures. (Atta 139)

To Rose, living under the reign of the corrupt Nigerian government is an undignified life. The government's War Against Indiscipline, as will be explored, specifically targets women as scapegoats through their participation in social struggle and unrest. Rose does not differentiate between this undignified life and the shame of smuggling or prostitution. It is also clear that in Rose's view, no Nigerian with financial stability had achieved it with dignity. Rose's conception of sophistication as spatially constructed, where the Global North is the benchmark of social capital, is contrary to the literary tradition of associating progress with the passage of time. For example, as discussed in the introductory chapter, time as progress is a key theme in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Rose's view of Nigeria is a Nigerian woman's parallel of Marlow's experience of the Congo as primitive and devoid of meaning. This cements Rose's conception of Nigerian women as primitive, and further bolsters her concerted drive to leave Nigeria to access the sophistications of more civilised geographies.
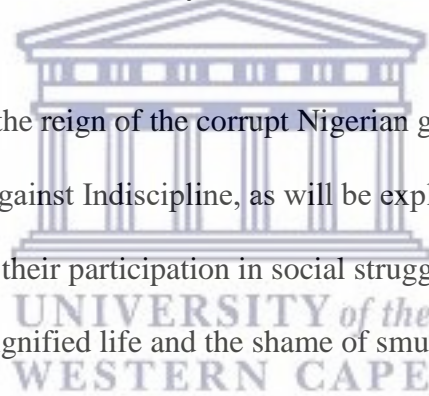
Rose's perspective of the Global North as an accessible site of stability and wealth is countered by her lack of financial access to it. Her longing for the world outside of Nigeria is shaped by the media she consumes such as the government's campaign to prevent emigration, as well as the success stories of travellers and importers such as the narcotics smuggler OC, Rose's sister, Violet, and Rose and Tolani's friend, Johnny, who is mysteriously involved in sugar imports. Rose's conviction that she can access the Global North is produced by what Appadurai calls the "mediascape" (33). In an amalgamation of Anderson's imagined community, the Frankfurt School's theorisation of the mechanical reproduction of images, and the French conception of the imaginary (*imaginaire*), Appadurai theorises a new space for the imagination in society. Appadurai's "scapes" are complex networks of influence shaped by transnational actors such as "nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities" as well as subnational groupings such as political, religious and economic movements, communities, families and the individual (33). The mediascape refers to "both the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)" and "images of the world created by these media" (35). In this scape, the "world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed," which results in the amalgamation of the real and the fictional (35). Appadurai concludes that, especially for those situated at the periphery, such images can construct "protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement" (36). The Global North that confronts Rose in Nigeria is a system of signs wholly divorced from signifiers, but treated as reality – it is Jean

Baudrillard's hyperreality.[19] However, Rose may never reach this destination not only because it does not truly exist, but because the prospect of transnational mobility, too, is largely an illusion. Despite the fact that Nigeria is arguably the most affluent country in Africa, at the transcontinental level it remains peripheral within what Appadurai terms the "financescape"– the global flow of capital (34). The disjuncture of the mediascape and financescape in the relationship between Nigeria and the Global North, combined with Rose's marginalisation within her patriarchal nation-state, spatially co-construct Rose's desperation to escape, and influences her subsequent decision to use her body to smuggle narcotics.

As Rose considers financial stability to be accessible only outside of Nigeria, she aligns herself with the patriarchal national authority that polices the country's borders. Like her sister, Violet, she participates in the oppression of women in an effort to escape what she considers to be her oppressive national space. In Rose's case, this finds its clearest expression in her attempt to convince Tolani to use her body as a place to store and smuggle narcotics, in addition to her subjection of her own body to the same cause. When their friend Johnny introduces the smuggler OC and mentions that he had just returned from the "United States", Rose immediately replies "Of America?" with keen interest (68). Tolani, however, notes that she was "not impressed" (68). OC did not strike her as a man who went to America for legitimate purposes. To her, his "face was drawn and his posture was hunched as though he'd spent time lifting heavy loads" (68). The women's disparate perceptions of their geographical

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[19] In *Simulations,* Baudrillard defines hyperreality a fiction that is invested with truth and cultural weight to the extent that it displaces and becomes reality.

status cause them to develop divergent opinions of OC. Whereas Rose reduces him to a representative of the Global North, Tolani pays attention to the particulars of his body and demeanour. Rose is more vulnerable to exploitation because of her belief in the value of Western opportunity; her desperation to leave the country for a better life makes it easier for her to place her body at risk, and for OC to commission her as a drug mule. The difference between how Rose and Tolani relate to their national space ultimately decides Rose's death and Tolani's survival. Rose holds a patriarchal conception of nationhood that resembles what Radhakrishnan characterises as a veneration of inside/outside logic. Her patriarchal conception of nationhood is extroverted – to use Susan Andrade's term – as it maps the world outside of the nation as male, and the seat of cultural progress and sophistication, whereas the interior is traditional, female and backward. Rose makes her desperation to leave Nigeria explicit in the build-up to her attempt to recruit Tolani for OC's smuggling mission: "'Look at us in this place, one problem after the other, one disaster after another. Instead of sticking together, we're fighting each other. I can't stand it. Me, I'm getting out.' I smiled. 'To go where, Czechoslovakia?' 'They're no better than Africans over there'" (Atta 105). Tolani's smile and humour in this situation indicate that she is more critical of the view of nationhood to which Rose subscribes. She does not consider the exterior world to be culturally or socio-politically superior, and the internal national space to be ahistorical, conservative and stagnant. Rose, however, is desperate to cross the border to the outside. As discussed in the introduction, the word "place" carries associations of meaning, memory and belonging. Rose's use of "place" when describing her resentment toward Nigeria demonstrates that her home country has become unhomely to her. Rose's commitment to "get out" leads to her departure, first through the depersonalisation or objectification that occurs when she turns herself into a smuggling vessel, then through her final escape in death.

Tolani, on the other hand, views the difference as purely spatial, and does not ascribe values to these spaces based on the cultures and practices they construct. Tolani's and Rose's disparate views of Nigeria are further evidenced by a conversation they have in the opening chapter of the novel. As they sit on the bus – their daily reflective space – Rose criticises Tolani and Sanwo's postponement of their wedding in order to save for their dowry, as she prefers Western engagement practices:

> Rose often complained about being a Nigerian. She thought she was born in the wrong country. She wished she had been born in Czechoslovakia because the name sounded sophisticated. Nigeria was uncivilized, she said. "A diamond ring is like a dowry," I said. "And we do 'I do, I do' over here." She nodded. "Yes, but we add our customs to it, letter writing, engagement, all that. Aunts, uncles, cousins, everybody involved. By the time you've finished, you've married a whole village." (Atta 11)
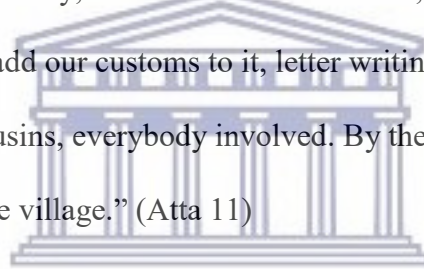
Tolani interprets Rose's preference of Western courtship rituals as part of her desire to be considered "civilized". It is clear from her belief that she was born in the wrong country that she equates living in Nigeria with living in a primitive space. The fact that she also rejects combining the Western and indigenous practices to have both the dowry and the ring, indicates that the root of her objection lies in her desire to be "sophisticated," and this is a matter of the geographical origin of the custom. Tolani, on the other hand, equates the two sets of practices – "a diamond ring is like a dowry" because both customs are ritual-based and place a monetary value on the bride. For Tolani, the difference is purely geographical – if you are born in Africa you perform African customs.

When Rose's smuggling endeavour results in her death at the airport, Tolani returns to her mother Arike's village to help her to locate a sense of identity, as her mother is one of the key characters in the text that does not perceive a value difference between Nigeria and other countries. Tolani's move from a globalised city space to a rural space allows her to find a measure of reprieve in the local. In the small town, she is more sheltered from the transnational dynamics – the pull and influence of the Global North – that led Rose to her death. In Arike's narration of her encounter with Alex, a visitor from Belgium, it becomes clear that she much prefers the company of her fellow Nigerians. For example, she dismisses Belgian women as "lazy" when Alex states that some of them do not want children (168). She refuses to appropriate their cultural framework, and instead interprets their behaviour in terms of the systems of meaning and value in which she participates in her village. This is also likely a result of the fact that Arike's direct experience with white women happened within her own territory – her village – which was a space foreign to these women. Their bodies rejected the space of the village: "I'd seen *oyinbo* women, priests' wives mostly, and they were always sick with fever. If they had a light load to carry, they handed the load to their husbands. They couldn't take the heat. Sometimes they fainted, and after they woke up, they wanted water to drink. I'd heard them speak with squeaky voices, skew! skew!" (Atta 169). As she saw them within the country of Nigeria, and more particularly within her village, she was able to apply her gender paradigm to them, and to her they lacked the valued virtues of strength, health, hard work and maternal authority. On the matter of their high-pitched voices, she notes that she "couldn't trust them to handle a serious situation" (169). Arike is judging the European women as less useful according to her geo-ethnically constructed view of ideal womanhood. This local Nigerian femininity is constructed according to the needs of the men in her village, and therefore requires her alignment with the patriarchal order. Unlike Rose and Violet, Arike does not feel the pull of the Global North

and does not use this as a tool to oppress other women through space. However, she does use patriarchal gender regimes produced in her local village space to evaluate women from the Global North, and find them wanting in their usefulness to the local patriarchal order. The Global North as a signifier for cultural sophistication and opportunity for class mobility therefore does not affect Arike in her rural context as much as it affects Rose and Violet in the city. In *Lyrics Alley,* the lure of the Global North – here represented as the cities of Cairo and London – as a site of opportunity for class mobility similarly motivates Nabilah's participation in patriarchal systems of oppression.

In *Lyrics Alley,* the comparison between Sudanese national space and Egyptian national space returns different results depending on the focalising character's perspective. Some of the characters view Sudan as a progressive and important national space in its own right. However, it is mostly men such as Mahmoud (40, 268) and Ustaz Badr (60) who share these positive sentiments about Sudan, and it is in their power that national authority is rooted. The women in the text do not express such sentiments, with the exception of Waheeba, who openly disapproves of countries that are not "home" and, as will be established, also represents Sudanese patriarchy. Nabilah perceives Sudan as a primitive space compared to her native country of Egypt, which she views as modern and progressive. Where Waheeba is the older, traditional, patriarchal woman that represents Sudan in the text, Nabilah is the younger, modern Egyptian woman that serves as Waheeba's foil. Therefore, whereas Waheeba reinforces traditions that are often exploited by patriarchal power, such as covering women's bodies, limiting women's access to spaces, and performing female genital excision, Nabilah despises these practices. However, as will be discovered later, this does not prevent Nabilah from participating in patriarchal behaviour herself. Nabilah's dislike of Sudan in comparison to Egypt is similar to Rose's disdain for Nigeria in comparison to the Global North. The root of this is likely that Egypt has had greater exposure to global

capitalist modernity than most African countries, and this shows clearly in the nature of

Nabilah's complaints about Sudan.

For Nabilah, Sudanese national space is a site of deprivation lacking in sophistication

and complexity. For her, this perceived lack of progress manifests in personal terms as a

feeling of isolation and disenfranchisement:

> For Nabilah, the Sudan was like the bottom of the sea, an exotic
> wilderness, soporific and away from the momentum of history. It was amazing
> but constricting, threatening to suck her in, to hold her down and drown her.
> Sometimes she was able to hold her breath and accept, but on most days she
> struggled to rise up to the surface, working to recapture a routine like that of
> her mother in Cairo, a life of fresh air and energy, the natural bustle and order
> of civilised life. (22)
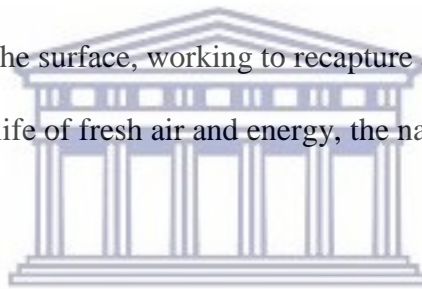
Nabilah's characterisation of Sudan as "exotic", "soporific", and "constricting", as

opposed to Cairo as "life", "fresh", "energy", "bustle", "order" and "civilised", makes it clear

that Nabilah feels oppressed by Sudanese life, and considers it to be lacking in the progress

and modernity she is accustomed to in Egypt. To her, Sudan does not share a map with

Egypt; instead, she considers it to be part of the sea, that empty space which separates nations

and continents. Her description of Sudan as a soporific "exotic wilderness" again calls to

mind the colonial, "empty" Africa of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Nabilah also hereby

conjures the divisive representation of the continent (earlier discussed), which is

problematised in the fictional world of Libyan writer Ibrahim al-Koni. Elliott Colla, the

translator of some of al-Koni's novels, describes this as a world of opposing forces:

To the South lies a world of myth, magic and superstition. It is the place where the caravans carrying blue cloth, slaves and gold originate. It is a place of cyclical time – the rising and falling of dynasties and the ebb and flow of Islam, which sometimes advances into the jungles, and sometimes is repelled by deeper animist traditions. To the North lie the distant Arab cities of the coast and after that the sea. It is a place associated with mechanized technology and warfare, the direction from which come the ceaseless French and Italian onslaughts. It is a place of permanent habitation, whose calendar is linear. (191-192)

Away from the bustle and modernity of Cairo, Nabilah feels like she has been relegated to the "periphery" (37) where she is vulnerable to the rhythms of Sudan. In the map of *Lyrics Alley,* and of Nabilah's mental geography, Cairo is her centre, in Wallerstein's sense, and Sudan is the locus of less complex and developed economic and cultural activity. However, despite its budding national identity, Sudan remains a province of Egypt at this moment in history, and the comparisons that Nabilah draws are therefore more accurately described as translocal.[20] Nabilah despises the lack of sophistication she sees in the medical care provided for her husband (27), the manual sewage system, female genital excision, the scarcity of hairdressers, a lack of privacy, dusty spaces, and the possibility that a jealous Waheeba may harm her with "black magic" (96-97). As being a woman already marginalises

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[20] Robert Tally adapts Wallerstein's system to work within a nation as a way of theorising the relationships between urban and rural space (91), but as Khartoum and Umdurman are also large cities like Cairo is, this model does not apply here.

her in a patriarchal nation, this further displacement to the periphery makes her feel all the more disempowered. To her, Cairo is the Global North, and her life in the South is seen as punishment. This is consistent with the cause of her mobility, as her move to Sudan was set in motion when Mahmoud Bey saw a photo of her in a shop window, and decided to acquire her. In her mother's decision to reinforce Mahmoud Bey's view of Nabilah as an object for trade, and Nabilah's own decision not to resist this objectification, she was moved from her home at the "centre" to a marital home in Sudan on the "periphery".

Whereas Nabilah has varied geographical experience, Waheeba, by contrast, has never left Sudan and, being illiterate in the 1950s is not exposed to media that can provide her with ideas of a greater geography. As a result of Waheeba's peripheral position in Appadurai's mediascape, Mahmoud and Nabilah consider her Sudanese femininity to be insular and primitive. Mahmoud associates her with "decay and ignorance," the "stagnant past" and "crudeness" (46). He becomes more convinced of this when he encounters Waheeba's limited mental geography. When she asks him whether their son Nur has arrived safely in Alexandria after a comically short travel time, he thinks of her as a "stupid woman, ignorant of concepts of distance and time" (45), rather than a concerned mother. His annoyance with her grows when she asks him if Cambridge is also in Egypt, and whether England is further than Egypt (46). Waheeba has not had enough exposure to the world beyond Sudanese borders for it to be imageable to her.[21] Waheeba's entire life has revolved

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[21] However, because the literal geographical details are opaque to her, Waheeba expresses a more abstract observation that Mahmoud fails to appreciate. Waheeba's incorrect assumption exposes the extent of cultural colonialism in Egypt. As with the Anglophone

around serving as Mahmoud's wife and the mother of his children. She crosses the Sudanese border for the first time when visiting Nur in a hospital in Alexandria. The experience of crossing space is traumatic to Waheeba, who is accustomed to the security of her defined place in the *saraya.* As a result, it is Nabilah who is invited to travel to London with Mahmoud to help take care of Nur. Instead of proposing that Waheeba travels to London instead, as she is mother of the injured boy, Nabilah only mentions to Mahmoud that this will be an insult to Waheeba, who might "take offense" (144). By implying that Waheeba's possible dissent is a matter of Waheeba's pride rather than the despair of a grieving mother, Nabilah portrays her co-wife as proud and unaccepting of her husband's will, thereby using the patriarchal system to further disadvantage Waheeba. Nabilah's agenda is to amass more power for herself, here in the form of access to the Global North, by choosing to speak negatively of her co-wife rather than to help her. As a result, Mahmoud simply replies that "London is not a place for her" (144), implying that Waheeba is not progressive and modern enough to function in London without embarrassing him. Through the lens of Radhakrishnan's characterisation of the gendered inside/outside logic of patriarchal nationhood, Waheeba is the stagnant, female Sudanese interior, and Nabilah participates in the progressive, male exterior – Mahmoud's future in a larger, globalised world. Nabilah is complicit in Mahmoud's patriarchal control over Waheeba's access to London and her injured child when she smiles at the news of her co-wife's misfortune. Even though she is well aware of the pain that Mahmoud's decision will cause Waheeba, she does nothing to

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university that Nur attends in Alexandria, Cambridge could easily have been located in Egypt. Consequently, to some extent Cambridge can be considered to be located Egypt through the proxy of the Anglo-Egyptian government and pervading British culture.

support the grieving mother in gaining access to her son – instead, Nabilah smiles at the knowledge that she had bested her co-wife – taking pleasure and participating in her oppression.

The socio-spatial construction of patriarchal femininities in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* arises from a patriarchal view of nationhood that characterises the interior as female and insular, and the exterior as male and progressive. This view can exacerbate the proclivities of patriarchal women to oppress women in an attempt to escape to the Global North, or else define themselves as superior to their counterparts – their others – in their current context in the Global South. The motif of women's use of patriarchal national power to advance their own socio-economic positions can also be observed in public spaces where the state comes into direct contact with its citizens, which serve as scaled down representations of the national space itself.

National Spaces: Patriarchal Women in State Infrastructure in *Swallow*

As Boehmer notes, the "administrative structures" within a national space represent one of the ways in which the postcolonial nation is a "male-constructed space" (*Stories* 22). In *Swallow*, Atta's representation of patriarchal national authority features most strongly in such public spaces where the population interacts with state institutions. In the introduction to *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, Haleh Afshar notes that a "fundamentalist view of women as sources of evil has led to governments as diverse as those in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana and Iran to formulate policies that have similar results in marginalising women" (5). This phenomenon is demonstrated in *Swallow*, where such "state infrastructural" spaces are presented with some detail. The key examples in the text are the bank where Tolani works and spaces of public transport.

Tolani laments the corruption within the bank where she is employed, and the institution's failure to serve its purpose of boosting the local economy and serving "the masses" (Atta 14). Instead, as a state institution, it is a space most easily navigated by military men, who benefit from the corruption driven by management. As the space where national capital is guarded, exchanged, valued and distributed, the bank is a symbol of national wealth and its unequal distribution. Although corruption negatively affects everyone, only male characters benefit from it, as they have access to management-level positions within both the financial and governmental sectors. The national space, scaled down to the bank building, therefore maintains patriarchal masculinity. For example, when Colonel Daodu, a former military man, enters the bank, Tolani is forced to endure his flirtations and help him to ascend the stairs (82). Although he is injured and aged, he still holds more power than Tolani within the space of the bank, as the place is designed to privilege male national authority. The bank shapes Tolani's body as an object for his pleasure: he grabs her buttocks while she helps him up the stairs, with no consequence for himself (83). As Radhakrishnan, Boehmer, Garuba, Wilson-Tagoe and others have observed, women's bodies are a common allegory of the nation in colonial and postcolonial texts. Women's bodies serve, in turn, as sites of subjugation and control in their representation of the landscape, and as the embodiments of culture and tradition. Tolani's treatment in the bank, as a site of patriarchal authority, is therefore a scaled down representation of her position in the national space. The invasion of Tolani's personal space by the military man is facilitated by a power relation created between them within the space of state infrastructure, and is allegorical of the corruption and exploitation caused by the continuing clandestine military rule of Nigeria.

Despite the fact that the bank is a space that privileges men, there are women who utilise this patriarchal national authority for their own socio-economic advancement. Two examples of women who attempt to gain power by oppressing other women within the bank

are Franka, who is Tolani and Rose's colleague, and the wife of Tolani's fiancé's uncle, Chief Odunsi. Franka – also referred to as "Radio Nigeria" due to her tendency to gossip – witnesses the moment when Tolani's superior sexually harasses her. Franka then decides to recount the events of Tolani's sexual assault by both Mr Salako and Colonel Daodu to the other employees in an effort to bring shame on Tolani as a woman who seduces men in power (87). Tolani's promotion has driven Franka to compete for the small amount of power available to women. She thus brands Tolani's femininity as transgressive and – as discussed shortly – a source of national "indiscipline". Franka uses the space of the bank as a map of national male authority (as well as the national distrust of women) as leverage in her competition with Tolani. Tolani encounters another patriarchal woman in the bank when Chief Odunsi's wife calls on Tolani's superior, Mr Salako. As implied by the lack of her own proper name in the text, Chief Odunsi's wife garners her power directly from her husband's status. He is a local chief, and the uncle of Tolani's fiancé, Sanwo. With her husband on the government's payroll, Chief Odunsi's wife demands special treatment in the bank, and asserts her power by treating the other women as servile and beneath her notice. For example, Tolani notes that Chief Odunsi's wife "squared her shoulders and didn't even bother to look at [her] as she spoke" (107). The bank building, as a national asset, is a place where she can exercise her patriarchal power. Ignoring Tolani's protests (107), she uses her power to gain access to a restricted space – Mr Salako's office – by overriding Tolani's power as the gatekeeper. Women such as Tolani and Rose, on the other hand, are sexually assaulted in that same place. Chief Odunsi's wife's status is also partly facilitated by her associations with the Global North. Tolani notes that Chief Odunsi's wife bleaches her skin, and sent her children to be educated in England (107). Her performance of a different geographical identity implies that she also has class superiority over Tolani. As with her patriarchal power, Chief Odunsi's wife's participation in global capitalist modernity is another form of associational status.

Primarily, however, the space of the bank as a state asset allows her to present herself as someone with a form of patriarchal national power, which enables her to participate in the oppression of women.

This pattern also emerges in spaces of public transport. As large numbers of Nigerians use trains and buses, transport terminuses are spaces of the governmental exercise of public order. Tolani describes the brutality of the government's treatment of its citizens:

> After work, the crowds were there, waiting for the same buses, heading
>
> in the same direction of the mainland. Quarrels, plenty. Chaos, unbelievable.
>
> Sometimes, the police showed up and horsewhipped people. They had always
>
> done that, but the government's War Against Indiscipline gave them a
>
> legitimate reason. Now, they could say it was part of their duties to ensure the
>
> public behaved in an orderly fashion. They treated us like cattle. (Atta 21)

The brutality of this national power is an exercise of masculine force over weaker-positioned bodies in an attempt to own public spaces, and is justified through this "War Against Indiscipline". In "Women and the State in Nigeria: The Case of the Federal Military Government 1984-85," Carolyne Dennis unpacks the intersections between the government's War Against Indiscipline and gender:

> "Indiscipline" ranged from those smuggling large quantities of
>
> petroleum and currency out of the country to market traders who profited from
>
> scarcity, to unconscientious salaried workers. Among other groups guilty of
>
> anti-social behaviour of this kind, three categories of women were identified
>
> as contributing to the breakdown of social discipline: wives and mothers who

failed to devote their time to the upbringing of their children, single women

who provided a source of temptation to men; and petty traders who hoarded

essential goods and created congested urban centres. (13)

Dennis posits that the Nigerian national government considers a primary source of

indiscipline to be "the inadequate socialisation of the individual" as a result of "the failure of

wives and mothers to perform their domestic duties properly" (22). Once again, women

shoulder the responsibility for national culture and tradition, despite the male control of state

power. Men and patriarchal women alike point out those women who are seen to contribute

to indiscipline in any way. An example of this is when Tolani attempts to resist the national

police's brutal treatment of commuters at this same bus station, and another woman fiercely

blames Tolani, and tells her to "move [her] skinny self" (189). An old woman also

approaches Tolani and tells her to "disobey and question" when she arrives at home, but not

"over here" in the bus station (190), a space of state infrastructure that concretises patriarchal

nationhood. Tolani's resistance is not seen as a symptom of the government's unfair

treatment, but of her indiscipline as a woman. Whereas Tolani's resistance to absolute,

violent state control is suppressed by the complicit women around her, Rose offers her own

body – and to an extent, Tolani's – for patriarchal exploitation. This can also be observed in

how, similar to their creation by state institutions, patriarchal women are produced by the

penetration of national patriarchy within intimate, small places such as the domestic space

and the body.

The Introverted Gaze: Home Affairs

Rose's desire for financial security and cultural sophistication manifests spatially in

her attempts to reach the Global North, a pattern mirrored in the value Nabilah ascribes to her

Egyptian nationality in *Lyrics Alley.* Nabilah considers herself to be more sophisticated than her Sudanese counterparts by virtue of her Egyptian origin. As discussed, Waheeba and Nabilah personify their respective nations, acting as the bearers of their national cultures. Nabilah's slim figure is dressed in the Western-influenced fashions of Cairo, while Waheeba, swathed in her *tobe*, has the voluptuous figure that conforms to Sudanese hegemonic femininity, and tribal scars on her cheeks. As Nabilah values the Global North as the site of sophistication, she considers her femininity to be hegemonic in the global sense, and therefore superior to Sudanese hegemonic femininity. As discussed in the introduction, gender theorist R.W. Connell conceives of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant gender performance within a particular gender regime (120). A gender regime is the "state of play in gender relations" in a given institution of any scale where certain gender performances are met with specific results (120). The gender regime is therefore organised around a particular dominant gender performance that is deemed the ideal. For example, in *Lyrics Alley,* hegemonic masculinity in the Abuzeid household and family business is heterosexual, patriarchal, frugal, and heavily invested in economic and political affairs. Nur, the youngest Abuzeid son, is therefore transgressive within this gender regime because he is interested in the arts; his activity as a poet and lyricist brings shame on his father and uncle.

Although Connell intended for hegemonic gender identities to apply only to masculinity, and for the concept of a gender regime to apply primarily within institutions varying in scale, it is also applicable here as a means to describe hegemonic national

femininity.[22] Nabilah's actions suggest that she considers Egyptian femininity to be far superior to Sudanese femininity. She considers the Sudanese women to be primitive, unattractive and crude (33). To aid in the spatial formation of her own hegemonic femininity, Nabilah transforms the *saraya* in Sudan into a place she considers to be homely: an insular domestic sphere that resembles Egypt. Sudan – as Nabilah's Conradian Congo – is empty for her until she assigns meaning to it. For her, meaningful place is Egyptian, so her process of what Tim Cresswell calls "place-making" (*Place: A Short Introduction* 7) is the creation of an Egyptian microcosm:

> Instead of a hoash, there was a shaded terrace with a wicker table and chairs where, in winter, she could sit and enjoy her afternoon tea, while watching Ferial ride her tricycle and Farouk kick a ball in the garden. Instead of the traditional beds lining the four walls of the sitting room, she had spacious armchairs, a settee, and, in pride of place, her gramophone. It was a proper room, a room to be proud of. (25)

Nabilah describes each element of her home in relation to its Sudanese other, thereby implying that Sudanese customs are primitive and her own are modern in relation. Her spatially executed reverence for her Global North is similar to the room that the character Mustafa Sa'eed builds as a mausoleum to Englishness in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration*

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[22] In the introduction, I map why Connell's assertion that "hegemonic femininity" is oxymoronic is not valid in my application of the term. In short, when applied in a homosocial context, feminine identity is not competing with masculinity, and can therefore be dominant despite its situation within a larger patriarchal context.

to the North (موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال). Sa'eed has filled the room with walls of English texts and

portraits of his deceased English lovers; mementos of his former European life. Like Nabilah,

Mustafa had trouble reconciling himself with Sudanese national space, despite the fact that he

was raised Sudanese. The characters also differ in that Nabilah relies on her domestic

microcosm to establish and maintain her identity, whereas Mustafa depends on his to seclude

and conceal a part of him that he could not leave behind. In the foreign context of Sudan,

Nabilah relies on her home to construct her femininity as hegemonic in conformance with

Egyptian modernity:

> Guests reclining and sitting on beds, angharaibs made of rope being the
>
> only furniture in a room, the intimacy and privacy of a bed laid out for public
>
> eyes and use – was something that particularly infuriated her. It was, she
>
> believed, a sign of primitiveness, proof that the Sudanese had a long way to
>
> go. Meals too, in Nabilah's quarters, were served in the dining room, around a
>
> proper dining table, with knives, forks and serviettes, not clusters of people
>
> gathering with extended fingers around a large round tray, while sitting on
>
> those very same beds she had so many objections to. (25)

Nabilah's quarters are divided into functional units that promote the separation of

activities based on their level of intimacy. Her spatial organisation thus emphasises her need

for privacy. In Waheeba's *hoash*, Nabilah notices with disdain the Sudanese spatial traits that

she despises, and judges her co-wife to be accordingly primitive and inferior. That Nabilah

had decided the space was "inferior to hers" (171) before she saw it is testament to her

prejudice toward her national other. Nabilah condemns the space; it is "as traditional, and as

crude, as expected" (171). This reflection emphasises that her opinion is based on prejudice

against the country and her co-wife. However, Nabilah also observes characteristics that she

considers to be universally respectable: the quality of the linen, and the cleanliness of the space (171). Despite this, for Nabilah the presence of Sudan in the room – the "earthy, cloying scents of Umdurman" – remains too much to endure (171).

Nabilah's need to construct her own subjectivity around the hatred of her other results in her consistent support of Mahmoud's decisions that may negatively impact Waheeba. Her disdain for Sudan is projected onto Waheeba's home, but the home itself appears to reject Nabilah's Egyptian femininity as well. When Nabilah leaves Waheeba's quarters after an argument, the very architecture of the other woman's place revolts against its Egyptian occupant. The high heels of Nabilah's modern shoes cannot find solid purchase on Waheeba's uneven earth floor (176). Consequently, Nabilah's dramatic exit is humiliating, as she "totter[s]" inelegantly from the *hoash* (176). Nabilah's actions demonstrate that patriarchal femininity can be produced by transnational spatial dynamics yet still can be executed at the level of space and the body. This is reminiscent of the way that Rose's distaste for Nigeria's transnational status manifests in her oppression of Tolani through small space. Nabilah as female patriarch is therefore produced by space but also uses space in her oppression of Waheeba by condemning Waheeba's body as a site of inferior femininity. Nabilah's character offers a strong contrast to the role that Bolanle plays as the victim of female patriarchy in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Both Nabilah and Bolanle are the youngest, most modern wives in a polygamous household, yet where Nabilah uses patriarchy to disadvantage Waheeba, Bolanle is the victim of Iya Segi's patriarchal rule. These examples suggest that patriarchal femininity is produced by neither modern nor traditional femininity; it is shaped by the specifics of power dynamics within small spaces. Bolanle, as the graduate, literate member of the Alao household, is subjected to Iya Segi's traditionalist patriarchal rule, whereas the cosmopolitan, progressive Nabilah in turn oppresses what she considers to be her "primitive" traditionalist co-wife. The Alao household as Iya Segi's
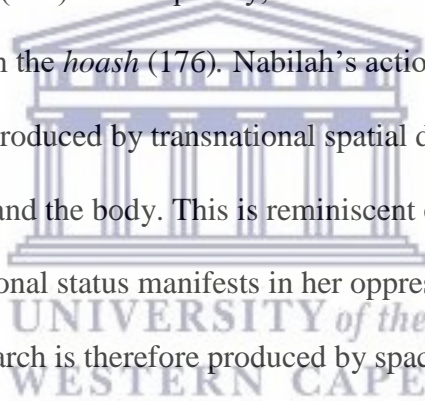
domain allows her to be a patriarchal woman in the former context, whereas Nabilah's proximity to her co-wife's domestic space in the shared *saraya* allows her to objectify, judge and disadvantage her traditionalist co-wife in the latter context.

As with the co-wives' domestic spaces, Aboulela also maps national culture on the women's bodies. Although women's bodies are discussed as a microspace in the fourth chapter, it should be noted here that in *Lyrics Alley*, bodies are a key place for the exercise and expression of national power and culture. For example, Nabilah's mother Qaddriyah explains to her that she does not consider Mahmoud Bey to be Sudanese because "if he *was* truly Sudanese, he would want [Nabilah] to dress in a tobe like every other Sudanese woman" (182). Mahmoud's drive to forge global capitalist connections in Sudan can be read on Nabilah's body, reflecting Radhakrishnan's conception of the female body as allegorical of national culture. The most extreme instantiation of this thematic occurs when the more insularly-minded Waheeba maps traditional Sudanese culture on Nabilah's daughter Ferial's body in an act of female genital excision. When Ferial's excision is performed at Waheeba's behest, Nabilah undergoes a corresponding transformation in her conception of her daughter's identity. She now considers her Sudanese, and by extension no longer Egyptian, which to Nabilah implies that Ferial cannot marry an Egyptian man and have an Egyptian future. In Nabilah's geo-ethnic paradigm, her daughter is therefore doomed to a future of primitivism and ignorance. Despite having entered into the marriage with Mahmoud willingly, Nabilah blames her mother for Ferial's genital excision in a dramatic confrontation: "'Look, Mama,' she said, swiping down Ferial's underpants to the utmost confusion and bewilderment of the child. 'Look what marrying me off to this retarded Sudanese has done to my daughter!'" (275). The vivid, emotive description of Nabilah's revelation mirrors Aboulela's visceral portrayal of the excision act. Aboulela describes the "slice of a knife, the tug and cutting away of flesh" and the girls' related injuries in detail

(186). These images evoke Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque as outlined in *Rabelais and His World*, where the body acts as a mechanism for the subversion of authority by engaging the taboo. Achille Mbembe argues that in postcolonial contexts, the grotesque body can be read as an allegory of the enactment of state power (106)[23]. This demonstrates the dependency of state power on access to and control of the body, as well as the potential for the body to act as a site of revolt and resistance (106). Corinne Sandwith observes that this aesthetic can often be found in African texts where the family structure mirrors state authority, and "the violence of the domestic sphere and the violence of the state are rendered as reciprocal and mutually illuminating" (103). Although Sudanese authority is not depicted as violent, the patriarchal structures of the state nevertheless penetrate the Abuzeid household. This, in turn, is the place that shapes Waheeba's geo-ethnic hegemonic femininity. Whereas Nabilah holds a position of patriarchal power earlier in the text, Waheeba too exploits patriarchal norms to oppress her co-wife when the opportunity arises. Just as it is not concomitant with tradition or modernity, patriarchy also does not necessarily attach to a single character. Instead, it is produced by the power dynamics within and between specific places. Despite the fact that Mahmoud expressly forbids female genital excision, Waheeba, as a patriarchal woman, maps the national space on the microspace of Ferial's body, turning her into a mirror of state authority.

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[23] This trope can also be observed in, for example, the writing of bodies in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the work of Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala.

The body as a site of national patriarchal authority is also a motif through which Atta engages national space in *Swallow*. In choosing to swallow the condom filled with narcotics and persuading Tolani to do the same, Rose allows patriarchy to invade women's bodies. When Rose reveals that she is desperate to escape their corrupt government and socio-economically unstable country, Tolani's response is to ask whether Rose is going to Czechoslovakia instead (105). This is because, at the beginning of the novel, Tolani reveals that Rose has always thought she should have been born in Czechoslovakia due to the fact that the name sounds sophisticated to her (11). By implying that Rose is smuggling to gain access to a more sophisticated world, Tolani creates the explicit link between Rose's decision to smuggle and her belief in geographical status. Rose has, however changed her mind about Czechoslovakia in particular, stating that they are "no better than Africans over there" (105). Her aim has shifted from merely leaving the country of Nigeria to specifically to going to a country she considers to be at the forefront Western culture, such as England or America. Rose and Tolani's divergent views of Nigeria result in a significant difference in their perceptions of their worth as women. Rose is willing to treat the body as an object in her desperation to leave, but Tolani, after considering the public executions and jail time that could result from smuggling, is more concerned about the devaluing of her person – to her, smuggling is akin to prostitution (139).

As a consequence of Rose and Tolani's different views of themselves, Tolani is not able to swallow the condom filled with cocaine – she could not fully submit to OC's patriarchal exploitation of her body. The title of the text suggests that this is the crux of the narrative; some women can "swallow" their own degradation to achieve what they desire, and others cannot. A "swallow" is also a common migrant bird that is able to travel between the global North and global South according to its needs – the freedom that Rose ultimately desires. Rose, however, is so desperate for transnational mobility that she is willing to view

herself as an object – a vessel for narcotics. In her conviction that she is no different to the rest of the Nigerian public, Rose's body emerges as allegory of the body politic. Andrade reads a similar motif in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* arguing that Mama might be seen as "the passive Nigerian public who, because she does not act for so long and then, when she does act, does not claim responsibility for her actions, stands for a quiescent and corrupted body politic" (Andrade, "Adichie's Genealogies" 98). Aside from representing a complicit and passive public that does not hold its government to account, the corruption of Rose's body in this case also represents the incongruousness of Nigerian postcolonial identity. As Garuba explains, "the body as sign is usually deployed as an iconic representation of a unitary, homogenous, bounded self. Based on the model of the bourgeois subject, the body becomes the natural instantiation of the pure, uncontaminated essence" (108). In swallowing the condom, Rose pollutes this unitary essence. Chatterjee and Radhakrishnan's paradigm of interior nationality being constructed as female and exterior, extroverted nationality as male, the corruption of the female body represents the dissolution of a cohesive, traditional national identity in the face of global capitalist modernity. Thus, although Rose's tendency to engage in spatial oppression is produced by her transnational positioning in Nigeria, she executes this behaviour through the small space of the body. Rose's behaviour in this regard will be explored as patriarchal femininity in the fourth chapter.

Despite feeling the same pressures as Rose, Tolani ultimately rejects the offer of escape, and instead turns her gaze inward in a dual sense. After attending a church sermon with a colleague and failing to identify with the foreign, masculine god she encounters there, Tolani travels toward the interior of Nigeria to Makoku town, where she grew up. Here she is able to reconcile herself with her hardships and reconnects with life in Nigeria through contact with her childhood community. In "Thinking Igbo, Thinking African," Nwankwo's

discussion of the connection between proximity and cultural reproduction suggests that remaining within the country helps to ensure the survival of individual cultures as well as the Nigerian national identity. Nwankwo states that "[t]he custodians of the culture always led and will always lead by virtue of proximity" (394). The "closeness with the earth" that those who remain within Nigerian borders experience allows them to accumulate knowledge and contribute to the growth and evolution of their cultures (393). This is illustrated in the text in the comparison of Rose's burning desire to leave Nigeria, and its impact on her life, with Tolani's decision to remain, and how this affected hers. While Tolani was temporarily swayed in wanting to participate in the smuggling exercise, she also undergoes an internal journey that was likely the cause of her inability to swallow the drugs. Her visit to her colleague's church engendered her understanding of the limits of her identification with Western culture: "How could I receive a message properly if it didn't come in exactly the way I spoke, from an image exactly like mine, a Nigerian woman just as broke? It was no wonder we suffered and our children suffered; we were praying to the wrong gods" (Atta 226). This is a key turning point in Tolani's experience of Nigeria. After being caught up in Rose's desire to leave the country behind, Tolani develops a desire to reconnect. When Rose dies, Tolani returns to her mother's village in an attempt to reabsorb her identity through proximity to the soil she came from. She does not escape the damage done to Rose entirely; in her attempts to swallow the condom, some corruption is still written on her body. Some of her hair falls out, and the villagers gossip that she looks like an old woman. However, under her mother's care, she soon begins to recover. In Rose's objectification of her own and Tolani's bodies in the service of male power, and Nabilah and Waheeba's exercise of patriarchal hegemonic femininities in their homes, the patriarchal national space is represented in these intimate microcosms, where women are subjected to it at the hands of other women. Rose's dream of a future that is free of socio-economic oppression turns to dust

as her body collapses at the airport. In this liminal space, where the border of Nigeria is most permeable to her, the condom in her body becomes porous as well, and releases the full force of her decision to surrender her body as an object in the service of men. Rose not only adopted the patriarchal agenda as her own but allowed it to become an internal enemy in her most intimate space – her own body.

Conclusion

Mapped as national space, patriarchal authority produces women who oppress other women by leveraging national spaces. This chapter's examination of *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* suggests that patriarchal womanhood attaches to neither a particular character nor a culture, but to the power dynamics produced by a particular spatial arrangement. When national space is considered in a transnational context, the patriarchal women in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* instantiate Radhakrishnan's characterisation of patriarchal nationalism as consisting of a static female interior and a progressive male exterior. For Rose in *Swallow,* this extroverted gaze manifests as a need to leave Nigeria to find her fortune in the Anglo-American Global North. As a result, she attempts to exploit her own and Tolani's bodies in the service of a patriarchal smuggling operation. The disjuncture between the mediascape and financescape at her location in Nigeria has caused Rose to believe that she can and should access the Global North, while in reality, she does not have the economic means to do so. As a result, she assumes a patriarchal femininity in an attempt to bridge the chasm. In *Lyrics Alley,* Nabilah takes a view of nationhood similar to Rose's, only in her case the Global North is represented by the immediate North in the form of Anglo-Egyptian national space. She considers herself to be more educated and cultured than her Sudanese co-wife on the basis of her nationality; in Wallerstein's sense, she considers Egypt to be the centre and Sudan to be the periphery. Consequently, Nabilah uses Mahmoud's patriarchal rule of the house to

disadvantage Waheeba so that she, Nabilah, can spend more time in Egypt and London. As patriarchal women are constructed by the pull of the Global North, so they are also produced by spaces permeated with national authority. In *Swallow,* state institutions and public spaces such as the bank and transport zones create women who use similar tactics to navigate the patriarchal space, with an eye on their own survival or advancement. This is suggested most strongly by Tolani having her voice silenced by another woman when she criticises the state at a bus station. Tolani also experiences disempowerment at the hands of a woman who reinforces or utilises state power in her encounter with Chief Odunsi's wife, who relies on her associational status to wield a form of national power. Finally, women in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* also develop patriarchal hegemonic femininities in the establishment of their domestic space and the treatment of their own and other women's bodies. The representation of national spaces within their homes and bodies – in Radhakrishnan, Chatterjee, Garuba and Boehmer's sense – constructed them as patriarchal women that police other women to align with geo-ethnic hegemonic femininities; identities that serve the local patriarchal order. In Nabilah and Rose's stories, one therefore sees that although they are produced as female patriarchs by transnational spatial relations, they execute their patriarchal power at the level of small space and the body. As seen in this chapter, national space penetrates many smaller spaces. Urban space – which will be the primary focus of the next chapter – houses the seats of governmental and military authority and facilitates the convergence of ideas that shape the modern nation, whereas the rural is most often presented as the seat of tradition.
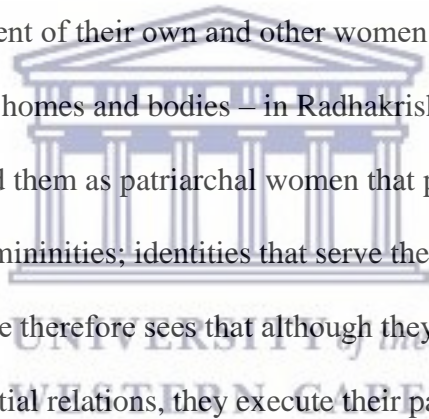
Chapter 2: Reading Patriarchal Femininities in City and Rural Spaces

Introduction

Having considered patriarchal femininity through the macroscopic view of global and African national spaces, the next level of spatial organisation considered comprises city spaces and rural towns. The cities under discussion in this study are Lagos and Ibadan (Nigeria), Umdurman (Sudan) and Cairo (Egypt). The rural spaces include Makoku Town in Nigeria, the unnamed Nigerian towns from which Baba Segi's wives hail in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010), and the equally unidentified agricultural village on the Eastern Nile Delta that forms the backdrop of *The Tent* (1998). There are numerous contrasts between these urban and rural spaces. For instance, governmental authority is rooted in city space, where the pace of change is faster and capitalist modernity has taken hold, whereas the rural areas are generally presented as sites of tradition and tribal culture. However, despite these differences, these spaces cannot be considered dichotomous. Rural signifiers such as livestock, tribal leaders and shamanism or witchcraft still abound in the most globalised and "modernised" of city spaces.[24] However, in spite of this porous boundary between urban and rural life, the spaces are written differently and construct different hegemonic femininities. For this reason, they are discussed here as city or rural spaces responding to how they are written. In their daily engagement with city and rural spaces, the women characters in

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[24] For example, in "No-Man's Land: Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and the Space of Postcolonial Alienation", Harry Garuba exposes the way the clan system observed in the desert has unforeseen consequences when transported and applied to the urban context of Mogadishu, as a site of postcolonial alienation.

Swallow (2011)*, Lyrics Alley* (2010)*, The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *The Tent*
encounter deeply entrenched systems of power that govern the spaces through which they
move. These networks of meaning exist within the architectural design of the spaces, as well
as in the rules that govern their daily use. In this chapter, I shall examine how urban and rural
spaces produce patriarchal femininities that disempower other women. Urban entropic force –
a draining, chaotic power here manifested as poverty, unemployment and a lack of mobility –
creates competition for resources among women, who are more deeply affected by this
entropy than men are. As a result of this competition, women use patriarchal power to control
or disadvantage one another. My primary focus in this regard is on mobility – specifically by
road – and how control over women's access to transport can render them disadvantaged and
insecure. Before proceeding with reading the texts through the above thematic perspectives, I
begin my study with a contextual overview of African city and rural spaces and a review of
their study in cultural and literary studies, including their intersections with gender.
Thereafter I reiterate key points from my overview of mobility studies in the introductory
chapter to locate my analysis of the road within these larger debates and connect it to
questions of gender. I also provide a brief geohistorical overview of the specific cities and
towns under discussion. Through this enquiry we shall discover how urban entropic force
fosters patriarchal femininities by promoting competition for resources, and how this force is
exacerbated by women's lack of independent mobility.

Reading African Cities and Rural Spaces

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams traces the historical differences
between literature set in urban and rural spaces. Williams provides a useful distinction
between "the fiction of the city" and "the fiction of the country" through the concept of
opacity, with opacity referring to how easily a space can be understood and navigated:

> In the city kind [of literature], experience and community would be
> essentially opaque; in the country kind, essentially transparent. […] The
> growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing
> division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between
> and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a
> knowable community – a whole community, wholly knowable – became
> harder and harder to sustain. (165)

Living in a rural, "knowable" setting thus allows for more agency in navigating big space and its foundational power structures. However, Williams cautions against nostalgia for the rural (165). Whether the opacity of big space is positive or negative is entirely context-dependent; for example, although transparent space is empowering in being easier to navigate, in *Swallow* the small town allows Arike's sister-in-law to gather knowledge of her movements and use this knowledge to control her. In *Spatiality*, Robert Tally explains that opaque urban space, despite being more difficult to navigate, also creates "opportunities and mobility" (89). For Tally, the relation between the city and the country, with the suburban as an "intermediary space", parallels Immanuel Wallerstein's division between the global periphery, semiperiphery and core (Tally 91). In some African contexts, however, the suburban is often replaced by informal and low-income housing areas. In the first volume of *The Modern World-System*, Wallerstein examines the flow of power between states in terms of "the complexity of economic activities, strength of the state machinery, cultural integrity, etc.", with reference the core, semiperiphery and periphery (Wallerstein 349). I shall explore this dynamic through Tally's reading of the city as the core or centre, and the rural as the periphery, and also examine the ideas of centre and periphery on an even smaller scale as they operate within the bounds of an African city – with the central business district acting as the core and lower income housing being relegated to the periphery.
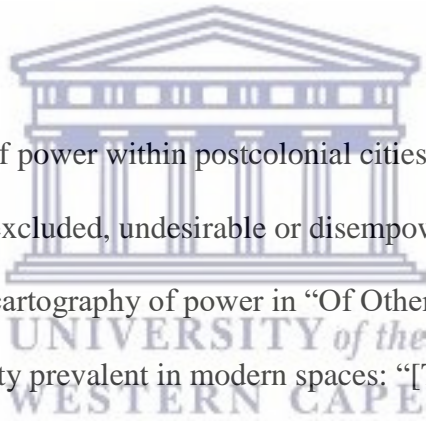
Although African countries and their respective cities differ widely in terms of their colonial experiences as well as in their establishment of post-independence governmental authority, there are key trends that emerge when African countries and their major cities are analysed. In *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*, Garth Myers notes that most African capital cities and large cities that exist today were once designed and built by colonial administrations (53). In many cases, the colonial city was built over an existing indigenous city, creating a palimpsest of spaces in which histories have been effaced and rewritten. The older city or big space was violently and rapidly transformed to serve the requirements of colonial power. Like the colonial African city, the postcolonial African city is also a layered city, where the current city is superimposed upon colonial structures. Compounding this layered structure is the continuing impact of globalisation in capitalist modernity. The postcolonial city is characterised by a continuous negotiation between local and global, colonial and native, urban and rural, rich and poor, as well as various tribal identities. In "A Global Sense of Place", Doreen Massey describes place as a particular moment that comprises a range of interdependent social connections. Place is thus dynamic and fluid, rather than having fixed identity, character and boundaries:

> Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around,
> they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations
> and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations,
> experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than
> what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that
> be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense
> of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links
> with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the
> local. (Massey 28)

A place, therefore, comprises the formative elements from past, present and future as well as their global influences. The result is a place without stable spatial or temporal boundaries, which is saturated with internal and external tensions and inconsistencies. Massey's claim is echoed in the work of Dustin Crowley, who further argues that considering a place through such a global, multiscalar lens does not reduce the specificity of a place or confer homogenisation upon it, for these very specificities were inherently shaped and co-produced by global influences (Crowley 63). These intricate, amorphous networks of social, political, economic and cultural meaning also have important implications for the acquisition and exercise of power.

As the seat of economic and political administration, the city plays a central role as a locus of power at local, national and transnational scales. Myers states that during the colonial period, the city became a symbol of opportunity in most African countries (53). This created a pull effect that drew rural communities to cities in search of a better life, which was exacerbated by the fact that the rural areas were plagued by "landlessness, herdlessness, involution, poverty, and lack of employment" (53). The result was the "rural poor becoming the urban poor" – an effect that only became more pronounced after independence (53). This is evident in the rapid growth of postcolonial cities that see an influx of rural migrants and are simultaneously exposed to global capitalism. Bill Freund traces the origins of this population growth in *The African City: A History* to the rapid expansion and structural growth in the period immediately following World War II (143). According to Freund, this trajectory continued with even more force after countries were declared independent (143). While the promise of work drew rural populations to cities, colonial urban design exercised an opposing force. Myers notes that under colonial administration, access to the city centre was strictly controlled, and in many African cities, this remains the case in the postcolonial period, as these spaces have not been not decolonised – the physical power structures remain

entrenched in the design of city spaces (53). Although economic opportunity and material

success are more attainable in urban centres than in rural areas, there is still insufficient

economic infrastructure and stability to provide enough jobs for the great numbers of

inhabitants, resulting in a "high degree of inequality" (53). Cities exclude migrants from the

economic activity of the city centre by relegating them to the margins of the urban space in

what can be described as a centrifugal structure. Access to the centre, where most of the

opportunities for formal or informal income generation is located, often requires extensive

travelling at great daily expense. As the Lagos in Sefi Atta's *Swallow* is a fictionalised

version of such a city, one can clearly see this pattern reflected in the sacrifices in both time

and money that Tolani and Rose make just to move between their derelict neighbourhood and

their work in the city centre.

The spatial execution of power within postcolonial cities is especially evident in the

organisation of marginalised, excluded, undesirable or disempowered sections of society. In

discussing Michel Foucault's cartography of power in "Of Other Spaces", Tally explores this

nuanced spatialisation of society prevalent in modern spaces: "[T]his spatialisation appears

not only with respect to phenomena traditionally associated with geography or geographic

knowledge, but also in such related (or not so visibly related) fields as demography,

medicine, urban and regional planning, and education, not to mention the burgeoning social

sciences" (Tally 121). The example of healthcare that Foucault and Tally use is particularly

relevant in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* where Bolanle attends two hospitals in

search of the cause of her infertility. The ill and dying are powerless and undesirable drains

on the more fortunate sectors of society and, as a result, they are sequestered to specific

places where they can be treated differently as required. Similarly, the poor are relegated to

the outskirts of the city where they can utilise only those resources allocated to them

according to their socio-economic status, such as shared water supplies and communal

ablution blocks. They do not have easy access to economic and administrative centres, but instead are required to travel long distances using underdeveloped transport infrastructure. Foucault's cartography of power will be examined in more depth in the discussion of private-public spaces of exclusion in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to note that the socio-spatial codification that Foucault identifies is a key feature of modern society that is evident in the centrifugal design of the city spaces in the texts discussed.

Despite important strides in economic growth, spatial exclusion from the centre is one of many challenging circumstances faced by numerous residents of African cities. Echoing Myers, Ranka Primorac notes in the introduction to *African City Textualities* that urban living in African cities has seen decades of "decaying infrastructures, long-term dearth of formal employment, as well as increased levels of violence, disease, political oppression and incursion of external economic and political interests" (2-3). Much African literature has strived to represent this reality in fiction covering various regions and periods. Some key examples include Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*; Nuruddin Farah's *A Naked Needle*; Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo trilogy, *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*; Sefi Atta's *Swallow* and *Everything Good Will Come*; Chibundu Onuzo's *The Spider King's Daughter* and *Welcome to Lagos*; and Chris Abani's *GraceLand*. The ways these cities and their lived realities can be read as texts and represented in literature have been examined in works by theorists such as Dustin Crowley, Sarah Nuttall, Achille Mbembe and urban theorist, Jennifer Robinson. Primorac notes that key themes that emerge in contemporary studies include "the multiple cross-connections between city and textual networks, the interface between text and violence, and the orientation of city texts towards the future" (2). In the afterword to *African City Textualities,* Robinson notes ways of studying the spatiality of a city by examining various systems of meaning:

A large part of what one might recognise as the distinctiveness of

urban life concerns the spatiality of the city: the ways in which cities

assemble people, things, ideas, resources, and distribute these within the

city or set them in circulation again beyond the physical reaches of the city.

It is these spatialities of cities – assemblage, juxtaposition, separation as

well as the pure physicality of the built environment – which, according to

urban scholars, play a substantial role in shaping processes of creativity and

transformation (see, for example, Lefebvre, Massey et al.). (117)

These patterns of interaction are key to the construction and maintenance of power

within the city space, and will inform how I approach reading the lived urban realities of the

characters in the texts at hand. However, in contrast to Robinson's approach, my focus is not

on processes of "transformation", but rather on the dissemination and reinforcement of

existing patriarchal power structures. I read the city therefore not only through the lens of its

creative representation, but through the impact of entropic force on identity formation –

specifically in the construction of patriarchal femininities. For this reason, I shall use the

section that follows to examine the intersections between African urban spatiality and gender

questions.
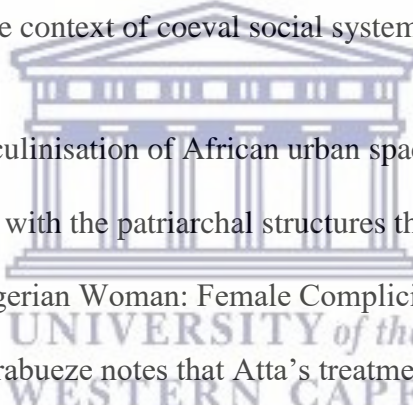
Although the study of literary urban spaces makes up the greater part of this chapter,

city spaces are studied in parallel with rural spaces. Scholarship of African rural spaces, in

terms of a clearly articulated spatial approach, is less developed than the study of urban

spatial realities, for the simple reason that rural studies tend to focus on very specific

sociological elements of rural life, such as the role of water or the mechanics of trade.

Literary or cultural studies approaches to African rural space generally focus on specific

regions, such as the Sahara. As such, the level of abstraction and macro-pattern recognition

present in the study of African cities has been lacking in the study of rural African spaces. For this reason, I shall contextualise specific rural spaces individually later in this chapter, after the overview of questions of gender in African urban and rural spaces that follows.

Gender in Literary Representations of African Urban and Rural Spaces

As discussed in the previous chapter, national authority is gendered as masculine power in most nationalist discourses. The relevant structures of government are militant, autocratic and patriarchal, and they are mirrored in smaller spaces such as businesses and even family homes. The result is that women are perpetually relegated to the peripheries of these spaces, and they face greater challenges accessing the centre than men do. The extreme forms of patriarchal masculinity that flourish in the city space exacerbate the disenfranchisement of women within these spaces. In her study of Western feminist readings of Mariama Bâ's work, titled "Urban Spaces, Women's Places: Polygamy as sign in Mariama Bâ's Novels", Obioma Nnaemeka considers how modernity has impacted upon various African masculinities. African cities are already dissonant, as global capitalist modernity intersects with various tribal, colonial and national systems. As a result, the urban African man often "juggles and manipulates different, sometimes conflicting, systems in an attempt to enjoy the best of all possible worlds" (Nnaemeka 171). As an example, Nnaemeka refers to the manner in which urban men would invoke the tradition of polygamy but adapt it to the urban context by not giving all wives equal attention and not allowing them to share the same domestic spaces and co-parenting structures. This prohibits the wives from experiencing the benefits of polygamy, such as sharing the burdens of parenting and household maintenance and having a transparent view of their husband's treatment of them in comparison to the other wives. In this urban context, the co-wives therefore become little more than concubines housed in different dwellings, and the husband is often the only party who benefits from the

arrangement. For Nnaemeka, urban capitalist modernity thus causes a "masculinisation of African tradition" (171). The liberalism that the Global North considers to be fundamental to metropolitan value systems is, in fact, not inherently emancipatory or progressive. By strengthening patriarchal systems, this masculinisation of urban culture leads to an increase in the marginalisation and disempowerment of women. Metropolitan masculinities thus take advantage of both traditional and modern modes of oppression and circumvent the equalising elements of both systems. This is the key difference between patriarchal oppression as constructed by the city and as constructed in rural space – the range of discourses through which to operate is more varied. What is more, some women are able to take advantage of these same versatile, evolving, robust patriarchal systems to oppress other women in their competition for resources in the context of coeval social systems.

In the light of this masculinisation of African urban space, it is not surprising that some women align themselves with the patriarchal structures that penetrate the city. For example, in "The Prison of Nigerian Woman: Female Complicity in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*", Florence Orabueze notes that Atta's treatment of women's oppression emphasises the fact that Nigerian women are complicit in the silencing of women's voices and help to perpetuate patriarchal rule (99). Whether this is to advance their socioeconomic status or simply to survive, women oppress other women specifically through space in urban contexts as the study of the selected novels shows. As will be seen later in this chapter, this phenomenon takes place in rural spaces also, but in different ways. Orabueze expands on the prevalence of patriarchal women in the novel she analyses:

> Furthermore, women are always afraid and uncomfortable with
> other women who have their own minds and are liberated. They do all they
> can to bring them down to their lowly level, where they will huddle

together and complain that men oppress and subjugate them. Bono and

Kemp opine "Emancipated women have only become further isolated

within institutions and in the eyes of public opinion. Not only do they

continue to suffer the age old lack of respect and support of the 'males',

they also now have to contend with the parallel lack of solidarity from

feminism" (1991: 294). (Orabueze 100)

Although Orabueze's assertion that women "always" behave this way is overstated, her comments nevertheless reflect the realities of the texts in this study, which show the ways in which women's oppression of other women is spatially constituted and articulated. For example, Nabilah's modern childrearing philosophies, fashion sense and freedom of movement in *Lyrics Alley* are sources of great anger and jealousy to her more senior co-wife, Waheeba. In her jealousy, Waheeba lures Nabilah's daughter Ferial from the safe, "local" space that is Nabilah's quarters, to the unsafe Sudanese or "foreign" space of Waheeba's quarters, where Ferial's genital excision is performed against Nabilah's will. Despite Waheeba's competitive stance toward Nabilah, it should be remembered that patriarchal women do not exclusively target "emancipated women". As seen in the previous chapter, Nabilah also leverages patriarchy to disadvantage Waheeba, even though Waheeba has far less freedom and education than her. Women that perform metropolitan identities are therefore not necessarily more liberal or progressive than women who exercise traditional or rural femininities. In the following section, the spatial configurations that shape rural and urban women will be contextualised.

The Road

As noted in the introductory chapter, the development of spatial literary studies was accompanied by a parallel interest in mobilities. Yi-Fu Tuan articulates the connection between place, space and movement when he identifies space as the locus of movement, and place as the locus of pause – we move from place to place through space (*Space and Place* 6). There are various approaches to studying mobilities that can occur at different scales, such as studies of diasporic or nomadic communities that cross national borders, rail travel and migrations, ships and spaces of the sea, horseback travel, and travelling by road by bus, car or walking. The category of road travel is my key interest in this chapter in both my readings of urban and of rural contexts. Mobility developed as a particularly central theme in the study of modernist literature, where mobility is associated with progress, freedom and adventure. In fact, Tim Cresswell notes that the representation of mobility as "liberty" and "progress" is one of the "foundational narratives of modernity" ("Politics of Mobility" 162). As discussed in the introductory chapter, these sentiments were already encapsulated in the 19th century in Baudrillard's figure of the urban *flâneur*. As with other metanarratives of the modern period, the *flâneur* is conceptualised as what Donna Haraway terms the "master subject" (586-587) – male, white, middle class and heterosexual. As such, mobility and the road as a vehicle of freedom and progress for men take a slightly different character in African literature. In Nigerian texts that draw on Yoruba mythology, the god Ogun occasionally makes an appearance. Ogun is a masculine god that Wole Soyinka – for whom Ogun is a patron deity – describes as "God of Iron and Metallurgy, Explorer, Artisan, Hunter, God of War, Guardian of the Road, the Creative Essence" (*Selected Poems* 89). The road is therefore generally gendered as a masculine space in Nigerian and proximal contexts. For example, in Soyinka's *The Road,* Ogun features in his capacity as god of the road, and the protagonist, Professor, undergoes a journey in search of meaning in stasis and – by association – death. In Ben

Okri's *The Famished Road,* the road is also brought into traditional mythology through sacrifice to the Priest of the God of Roads. Here the road is a symbol of progress in the service of greed, and functions as a physical reminder that all things are linked. As will be revealed in the discussion of *Swallow,* the road is generally a locus of victory and discovery for men, whereas for women – who are forced to encounter the road out of necessity – it is a site of peril and disempowerment rather than progress and self-discovery. In *Roads of Her Own*, Alexandra Ganser explores the "masculinisation" of the road and its literary representations. She notes that, rather than the "wanderlust or adventurousness" associated with male road narratives, the mobility of women characters is often motivated by "economic or political necessity" (34). For urban and rural women alike, mobility enables them to move from the periphery to the centre. Whether this is to reach the city from the country or to reach the central business district from the low-income housing on the outskirts of the city, women require mobility within big space to achieve physical and socio-economic security. This necessitates access not only to physical infrastructure such as cars, buses, trams and trains, as well as shoes for walking, but also to financial means and, as will become clear later, a great deal of physical resilience to gender-based exclusion from these systems.

Although mobility is clearly an important means of access to economic emancipation, it should not be considered inherently empowering or emancipatory. Massey articulates the complexity of the intersection of power and mobility:

> This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who
> doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in
> relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have
> distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people
> are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement,

others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are

effectively imprisoned by it. (25-26)

Mobility is therefore not inherently liberating or oppressive but is defined by the

systems within which it operates. Cresswell, too, captures the multifaceted and complex

functions of mobility in its representation "as adventure, as tedium, as education, as freedom,

as modern and as threatening" ("The Politics of Mobility" 161). For example, in *Place and*

Gendered Violence in South African Writing, Sorcha Gunne explores how in Miriam Tlali's

Footprints in the Quag: Stories and Dialogues from Soweto, the train is a space of gendered

violence against women which can sometimes be reclaimed from "the state and patriarchal

dominance" when women protect one another (xv). Mobility, as an intersection between

power and geography, can therefore be reclaimed or transformed, and is not inherently

oppressive or liberating.

Crowley also draws attention to the inherent ambivalence of mobility in his discussion

of Chris Abani's *GraceLand*. Although he is interested in larger space in a global context, his

caution against reading travel and mobility as inherently empowering remains relevant here:

These examples make clear Abani's understanding that while

mobility is a key component of both globalization and urbanization (and

whatever benefits may arise from them), movement itself is highly subject

to "social differentiation" as a process that "both reflects and reinforces

power" ("Global Sense of Place" 318). Depending on one's position vis-à-

vis the "power geometrics" of global flows, mobility may be something

people choose or something done *to* them (317) making simple evaluations

of its progressive power unsatisfactory. […] Because the mobility in these

texts lacks the clear autonomy and liberatory effect presumed by Eze and

Nwakanma, the urban experience in Abani's fiction often involves more

struggle and a sense of dislocation in the shifting, disruptive spaces of the

global city than they give voice to. (Crowley 136)

Although the movements in the texts under discussion are not transnational,

Crowley's caution against assuming that movement is necessarily progressive remains valid.

As with Crowley's examples, much of the movement that takes place in *Lyrics Alley,*

Swallow, The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives and *The Tent* lack the "clear autonomy" and

"liberatory effect[s]" that Crowley considers to be key to progressive mobility. That this is

typical of women's mobility is established by Massey, who argues that "[s]urvey after survey

has shown how women's mobility, for instance, is restricted – in a thousand different ways,

from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' – not by

'capital', but by men" (24). The fact that women move between spaces and places is thus not

as relevant as why and how they move or are moved. For example, Bolanle is moved to her

rapist's home against her will – in this case, mobility is something "done to" her. Crowley

posits that the "autonomy and liberatory effect" that Eze and Nwakanma ascribe to mobility

in Abani's fiction assumes that this effect is intrinsic to mobility rather than being one of its

many possible characteristics. To cite another example, in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous*

Conditions, a car transports Tambudzai into what her uncle, Babamukuru, considers to be

"progress" – here in the form of access to British-shaped education. However, in Tambu's

case, Babamukuru always drives the car, and therefore she is reliant on the support and

permission of the patriarchal order to have access to education and progress. What is more,

the particular kind of progress she is exposed to – as defined by Babamukuru – ultimately has

a retrogressive effect on the characters. The women characters in the texts under discussion

here have similarly complex relationships with mobility and find their access to it hindered by patriarchy, which is in some cases perpetuated by women.

Literary Places: African Cities and Rural Areas

In *Swallow*, friends Tolani and Rose traverse the city of Lagos daily using various systems of transport. In the opening chapters, they journey together from the flat they share on the mainland to the bank at which they both work on Lagos island, but when Rose is fired, she stops sharing Tolani's commute and work environment, and spends her days reclining on the couch in their apartment. Soon after, Rose becomes acquainted with OC, a mysterious smuggler, who involves her in his drug trade. Tolani and Rose's present-day urban narratives are interspersed with Tolani's mother Arike's account of her own youth in Makoku Town, and the challenges she faces as an industrious woman who needs to acquire her own form of transport in order to grow her business. After Rose's death, Tolani returns to her mother's home to recover from the trauma she experienced in Lagos. As one of the most prominent economic hubs in Africa, Lagos has formed the setting of many creative works, and has been studied by multiple literary theorists as a narrative space. In "City, Identity and Dystopia: Writing Lagos in Contemporary Nigerian Novels", Rita Nnodim identifies key patterns in the ways the city is written:

> "Writing" the city of Lagos, its sounds, smells, landscapes and people
> struggling to carve out spaces of meaningful and humane existence in times
> and spaces largely experienced as dystopian, is at the heart of a range of
> new and exciting contemporary Nigerian novels […] In writing the city, the
> novels evoke a metropolitan Lagos that astounds the senses, a vibrant city

of many cultures and languages, but also a dystopian space of deprivation,

despair and dislocation. (103)

For Nnodim, there is a focus on the sensory richness of Lagos, which generates a vibrancy that displaces and balances its dystopian realities. Characters that creatively navigate and negotiate the difficult circumstances of urban deprivation are a common trope in contemporary Nigerian novels such as Sefi Atta's *Swallow* and *Everything Good Will Come*, Chibundu Onuzo's *The Spider King's Daughter* and *Welcome to Lagos*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel,* Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*.

Much of the vibrant, layered character of literary Lagos can be ascribed to the variety of geo-historical forces that continue to influence it. In "The Stranger Problem and Social Ferment in Lagos", David Aworawo traces the origins of the city to its earliest known settlers: a Yoruba sub-group known as the Awori (272). Gradually, other Yoruba and non-Yoruba groups began to move to the area, most notably the Bini, Ijebu, Egba and Hausa (273-274). Much of the area's attraction lies in its geographical location, as it is ideally located for coastal trading (273). This means that some of the population has long been comprised of migrants who return home once they have sold their wares. In *Power and Powerlessness: Capital Cities in Africa*, edited by Simon Bekker and Goran Therborn, Laurent Fourchard's chapter "Lagos" examines the international factors that impacted on the geographic area that became the megacity. The name "Lagos" translates to "lakes" in Portuguese, and was given to the city by early settlers when it was still an island positioned between the sea and the lagoon (67). From the 18th century onward, Lagos became a hub of imperial activity:
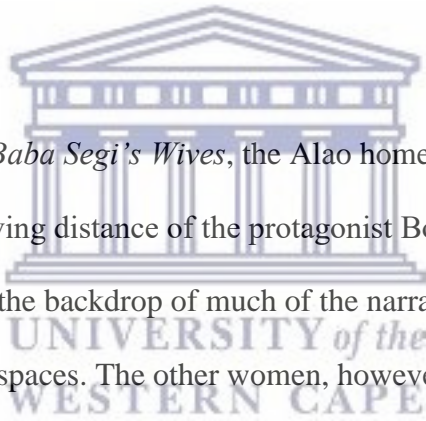
At the end of the 18th century, Lagos became the first slave port in

West Africa. From the 19th century onwards, like many other port cities in

Africa, it was increasingly involved in the circulation of people, goods,

ideas and technologies. By the 20th century, in fact, Lagos had been at the

forefront of new cultural and social practices in Nigeria, despite Abuja (the

new federal capital since 1991) and Port Harcourt (the oil capital in the

Niger Delta) having recently acquired increasing influence. (Fourchard 66)

The powers and people that established the city hailed from diverse local and global

origins. The resulting city is a palimpsest of influence, full of the vibrancy and sensory

richness that Nnodim remarks in its literary representations, and histories and economies that

create a challenging but creative literary environment for characters to navigate. Fourchard

notes that despite whatever dystopian and entropic forces operate within the city, it keeps

moving forward successfully, while hosting a large and growing population. Like the

architect Rem Koolhaas[25], Fourchard considers Lagos to be "at the vanguard of a globalising

modernity, mainly because the government has no impact on the city and because the city's

inhabitants regulate themselves" (Fourchard 66). Although it is clear in the previous chapter

and discussions to follow that government does indeed impact on the city and its citizens, the

ordered chaos that authors describe is partly a result of the city's multifaceted character, and

partly a result of its sheer size. Lagos is currently the largest city in Africa. Its most rapid

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[25] Rem Koolhaas has written a significant body of work on Lagos with the Harvard

Project on the City, but as his focus is the academic detail of urban planning, it is not

sufficiently relevant here. For further reading see *Lagos: How it Works*.

growth took place in 1970, after the end of the Nigerian civil war (Aworawo 277). As cited

from Myers' *African Cities* earlier in this chapter, this was a common trend in African cities

at the time, and was mostly due to the promise of paid employment that the city held.

Aworawo notes that the war's impact on industry in Lagos was negligible, which allowed for

rapid growth fostered by the oil boom (277). It is during this mid-century period that the Igbo

arrived in Lagos in significant numbers, and – after a brief dip during the civil war – their

population continued to climb (278). In light of the city's high population density and cultural

diversity, any form of power in Lagos is therefore a constant negotiation between different

political and tribal factions, which affects ordinary citizens – especially women – in tangible

ways. This was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the impact of a patriarchal

national authority on women.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the Alao home is located in the Nigerian

city of Ibadan, within easy driving distance of the protagonist Bolanle's childhood home. The

city of Ibadan therefore forms the backdrop of much of the narrative, even though most of the

action occurs within domestic spaces. The other women, however, hail from villages varying

in size, and this affects the formation of their identities and their experience of the home, their

husband and one another. While Iya Segi and Iya Femi come from established towns with

trade and industry, Iya Tope grew up in a small farming village that largely serves tradesmen

from the city. However, it is safe to assume that the fictionalised towns in question are all

located within reasonable driving distance of Ibadan for Baba Segi to have encountered these

women during his daily trade activities. Ibadan, like Lagos, is located in the southern part of

Nigeria. In *The World's Landscapes: Nigeria,* William T.W. Morgan describes the southern

zone as comprised of rain forests and savannahs "heavily modified by farming, based on root

and tree crops" (83). The area has a high population density, so there are many "traditional

political forms" (83) and systems of power. The area is mostly populated by Yoruba and Igbo

peoples (119). In comparison to Lagos, Ibadan is a smaller but equally vibrant and diverse city.

Ibadan is known for being the home of the earliest university in Nigeria, which was established in 1948 (Morgan 143, 145). In "Ibadan, its Early Beginnings", the geographer Bolanle Awe states that Ibadan emerged from an Egba village that was transformed into a war camp during the collapse of the Owu Kingdom and the arrival of the allied army[26] in Yoruba country (13). In this early form, Ibadan was a "small village on the less elevated southern extremity of a ridge of hills", which was on the edge of the grassland (14). Awe notes that the town was known for attracting young and ambitious men, not unlike Baba Segi himself, and mostly of Yoruba origin (14-15). As it was a new town ruled by military men, it was not as beholden to tradition, and this represented opportunity and progress to the daring (15). As one of the older towns in Nigeria, it is what Morgan calls a "polynucleated" town, where change has taken place through "an addition to the town rather than by an alteration to the existing fabric" (133). In particular, the rapid population growth that occurred in the 1960s resulted in more houses and new entrances being built into the large old compounds in the city centre, effectively making most them unrecognisable as distinct compounds (145). The house in which the Alao family lives in the fictional Ibadan is similar, as they are in close proximity to their neighbours and the house has a large yard, but they live together in the same, single home structure. In the areas surrounding Ibadan, the rural villages formed around the same time as the town that would become the city. Feeling exposed to the

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[26] This army comprised the Ife, the Ijebu and refugees from the collapse of the Oyo Empire.

wilderness and invading groups, many rural towns formed as safe spaces for farmers to congregate, often behind walls. Morgan describes these villages as "agro-towns" where farmers would live between their lands (73). In time, as empty spaces began to transform into large farms, agro-towns evolved into centres for local industry and services to the now-dispersed farmers in the countryside (73). The fictionalised versions of such towns in various states of assimilation into global capitalist modernity are where Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi grew up. The town from which Iya Tope hails is the most rural space of the three, and in description resembles the town in which Tolani in *Swallow* grew up.

Despite the fact that both *Lyrics Alley* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* focus primarily on domestic space, larger space bears more significance in *Lyrics Alley* due to the more allegorical nature of the small spaces. The greater part of the action is set in Umdurman, the second largest city in South Sudan. Cairo also features prominently, as it serves as Nabilah's foil to Umdurman. For Nabilah, where Cairo signifies freedom, modernity and progress, Umdurman signifies oppression, tradition and stagnation. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Umdurman shows a different face to the other characters. For Nur, Mahmoud and Soraya, there is great potential for growth and accomplishment in Umdurman, and they are experiencing its rebirth during the struggle for Sudanese independence from Egypt. Khartoum, Alexandria and London also feature as significant spaces in the narrative, but as will be discussed later in this chapter, their function is only to supplement or stand in comparison to the two primary cities.

In his book *Cairo: Biography of a City*, James Aldridge notes that since its ancient origins until about 1952, Cairo was "built by almost everyone except Egyptians" (3). While the modern elements of the city are European in origin, the medieval city was built by "outsiders, invaders, conquerors; even more by heretics, mercenaries, and one or two

madmen" (3). The historical role that Egyptians played in the evolution of Cairo was to be its "traders, boatmen, masons, carpenters, doctors, servants, artists, historians, and occasionally its aristocrats and almost always its slaves" (3). Therefore, although Egyptians spent centuries fighting foreign rulers for control over their city, they have always been key contributors to its culture and evolution. Like the other cities under discussion, Cairo is a palimpsest of past cities that were built, conquered, destroyed, and evolved. Modern Cairo rose around a city called Al Kahira, established by a former slave named Gawhar and his army (Aldridge 74). Cairo has had a greater variety of cultural and economic influences than the other cities under discussion – which is largely what shaped its modern, cosmopolitan character. Despite this, it is still considered to be a very "moral, almost puritanical" contemporary city (Aldridge 4). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Aboulela's Cairo – and Egypt as a whole – is characterised as the modern and progressive Other to Umdurman and Sudan. However, the tension between Cairo's characterisation as a modern, global city and the strict moral values that remain in place there is seen in Nabilah's interactions with the city. Nabilah's access to and movement within the city remains restricted in certain ways, and she still performs a submissive, at times patriarchal femininity. This is in spite of the fact that, when she is located in Umdurman, the juxtaposition of her Cairo femininity with the conservativism of Umdurman casts her as the more modern woman in the Abuzeid household.

Of the texts under discussion, the narrative in *The Tent* is situated in the most confined, claustrophobic space. It is thus difficult to provide a useful overview of the geo-cultural context of this text on the scale of a city or town, as the narrator never ventures into spaces of this scale. This is contrary to many readers' expectations of a Bedouin narrative set in the Nile Delta, as this conjures up images of nomadic communities freely and continually moving through vast, open spaces. However, with the exception of singular moments in the narrative, the novel is located only in domestic space. In *The Tent,* migrant Bedouin life is

allowed only to men, while most women are expected to stay indoors to protect their modesty. The protagonist and narrator, Fatima, tries to exploit her confined range of movement as best she can, but her situation only becomes more carceral throughout the text. In her book *The Bedouin,* Shelagh Weir offers an overview of Bedouin cultures, histories and geographies. The word "Bedouin" is derived from the Arabic word بَدَوِي (*badawī),* meaning "desert dweller", which is used by townspeople and villagers to describe nomadic tribes (9). The Bedouin do not describe themselves as such – they proudly refer to themselves as "Arabs", which is the pre-Islamic term for nomads (9). The very identity of this culture is explicitly grounded in its people's relationships with the spaces they traverse. Their movements are most strongly influenced by the particular needs of the kinds of animals they herd and what the landscape can offer as feed and water (9). They move in tribes made up of nuclear families and tribe membership is inherited along the male bloodline (9). Although the Bedouin have always been located near or on the outskirts of various towns or farms, Weir notes that they have recently become more settled:
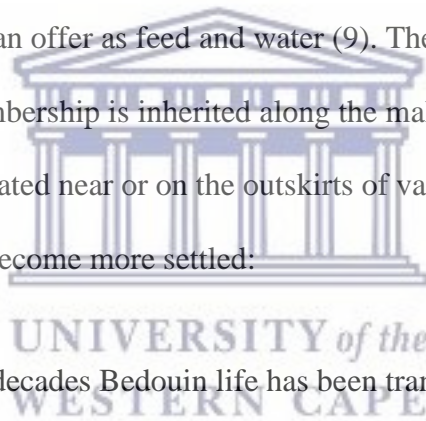
> In the last few decades Bedouin life has been transformed by changes
>
> in economic and political conditions. Many individuals and groups have
>
> settled in villages or towns, and men have taken up full-time work as
>
> farmers, drivers, wage labourers, office workers or teachers. Others have
>
> resisted the supposed attractions of modern urban life and government
>
> efforts to settle them, and have maintained their families and herds in the
>
> desert, many migrating periodically to work in the towns to supplement
>
> their incomes. (11)

The Bedouin people's settlement over time offers a real-world explanation for the situation in *The Tent,* where Fatima's father is nomadic while her mother and the family
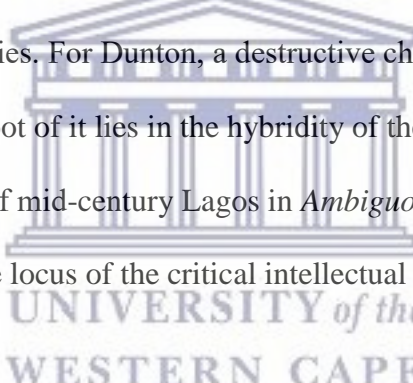
household remain stationary in the village. In his translator's introduction to *The Tent,*
Anthony Calderbank notes that this spatial organisation can be thought to represent the
centuries of contact that existed between the Bedouin of Egypt's Eastern Desert and the
agricultural villages of the Nile Delta (Calderbank 1). Although Fatima and her family are
clearly identified as Bedouin through their garb and cultural practices, they live among the
villagers. In this chapter, the figure of Grandmother Hakima – the only woman in the
narrative who is allowed to travel – will be explored as a patriarchal character who polices
the girls' and women's identities and freedom. In the absence of larger scale space in the
narrative, Grandmother Hakima acts as the signifier of rural and urban space in *The Tent.*
This will be discussed in the later section on mobility; for the moment, I turn to the role of
urban entropy in the lives of the characters that move through city spaces.

Entropic Cityscapes and Female Characters

In the introductory chapter of *Urban Africa: Changing Contours of Survival in the
City,* Abdoumaliq Simone states that modern African cities are becoming more "fragmented,
dispersed and outward-looking", and therefore the concept of a coherent "public" is
becoming less relevant (5). For Simone, the "public" comprises "open-ended flows of
communication that enable socially distinct actors positioned in different social networks,
territories and organisations to formulate collective orientations and generate working
alliances in pursuit of influence over issues of common concern" (5). As these groups are no
longer stable collectives, but constantly intersecting and in flux, "publics" become ephemeral.
Many of these groups are not recognised in the language of state and economic infrastructure
and as such are rendered invisible in the public sphere (6). The process of becoming visible is
a perpetual negotiation in cities, and shapes public life. As discussed, women are faced with
greater challenges than men in this regard, as patriarchal systems of the city space position

women at a consistent disadvantage. We shall therefore examine the intersection between women's invisibility in public space and women's navigation of entropy in African urban space. Women are also affected more than men are by entropy manifested as poverty, unemployment and lack of access to transport.

The effects of urban entropic force on women characters will be discussed primarily through the lens of *Swallow.* In this narrative, women's already precarious position under patriarchal oppression is exacerbated by the fact that Lagos wields an entropic force that threatens to remove all meaning from the characters' lives. In "Entropy and Energy: Lagos as City of Words", Chris Dunton examines the literary works of Helon Habila, Akin Adesokan and Maik Nwosu to dissect the ways in which the entropic forces of Lagos are countered by characters' own creative energies. For Dunton, a destructive chaos forms the sub-narrative of many African cities, and the root of it lies in the hybridity of these cities. Dunton discusses Georges Balandier's account of mid-century Lagos in *Ambiguous Africa* as both the centre of colonial administration and the locus of the critical intellectual class:

> Noting the usual signifiers of colonialist hegemony, for example, the
> "sartorial elegance of Lagosian bank tellers" (174), he acknowledges also
> that these cities are centers for nationalism and for critical and intellectual
> energies. Above all, he recognizes the following characteristics: the
> pluralism of these cities (to a greater or lesser degree Lagos is
> acknowledged to be far more wholly a British colonial construct than
> Ibadan), their centripetal force (drawing energies in towards them) and the
> rapidity of their growth and flux at a transitional point in African history.
> Significantly for the present study, Balandier recognizes that "[i]n its

physical aspect as in its human aspect, the city is seeking its form in

confusion." (Dunton 175-176)

Dunton is investigating – through a different lens – the inward and outward forces of the city space as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The centripetal force that Dunton raises is the power that draws people with ideas and ambitions to the city from other parts of the country. Within the city space, which is the centre of this centripetal force on a national scale, there is also a further centrifugal force that operates within the city itself. This is the outward force that excludes the disempowered from the central spaces of economic and national authority. Alongside these forces enacted on the city space, there is also a constant negotiation between the autocratic postcolonial nationalist regime and the resistant surge of the unaccommodated peoples. Transnational powers further complicate these systems of meaning, as global capitalist modernity is consumed by the already-plural collection of indigenous cultures. This spatial palimpsest of histories and powers combine to create the "confusion" and "entropy" that Dunton and Balandier both point out. For women, the additional destructive force of patriarchal oppression is added to this chaos, which makes the challenge of navigating the city – literally and figuratively – all the more daunting for them in comparison to men.

For Dunton, "images of entropy" become more centralised in later literary works set in Lagos, in which "fresh energies are foregrounded in an attempt to address the experiential realities of life in a city such as Lagos" (70). These energies particularly seem to function as resistance to change, as articulated in continual foregrounding of "the stresses and privations of Lagos life for those without wealth" (73). This entropic force is a paradigm relevant to all Lagos novels, whether recent or not:

Questions of scale apart, there are understandable continuities in the

Lagos imaginary from Ekwensi to the present, in respect of those aspects of

the life of the city its authors choose to highlight (not all of them by any

means negative): the hybridity of its population, the size of its informal

economy (and the fragility of this for individual participants), the lack or

breakdown of infrastructure and the misery this causes citizens (a

paradigmatic image here: the stress, loss of energy and amount of time

spent in getting to work), the attractions of the city's night life for those

who can afford it, the callousness and rapacity of (different levels of)

government and its administration (perhaps most powerfully conveyed in

the slum clearance chapters of Nwosu's *Invisible Chapters*) – the inventory

is familiar. For the better part of half a century, the identification of Lagos

as a site of high urban entropy has been firmly established in the national

literature, reflecting a worldwide – though often skewed – conception of

the pronounced difficulties involved in negotiating this city. (Dunton 73)

Although these themes have been present in earlier forms of the Lagos novel such as

Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana*, and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at

Ease*, for Dunton, the later texts have a unique emphasis on the potential for positive

"cognition and action" within these circumstances – artistic expression as a way to find

meaning and purpose in the intelligibility of chaos (73). As examples, Dunton cites the artist

Mike's mosaics and the journalist Grace's activism through writing in Atta's *Everything

Good Will Come*, and the "brief but compelling sighting of the radiant youths in Habila's

Waiting for an Angel" (Dunton 74, 71). In the texts being studied in this thesis, there are

certainly similar moments where women characters are able to counter destructive forces to

find meaning in creative expression. In *Lyrics Alley,* Nabilah is able to use her talent for fashion design and sewing to build a business in Cairo, and in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* Bolanle finds solace in her appreciation of beautiful crockery from all over the world sold in the Ibadan market. However, there are many instances in which women counter the effects of entropic city space by oppressing other women, and these instances will form the basis of the discussion in this section.

For male characters, this entropic force is mitigated by the support of patriarchal structures. The negative impact of this force is therefore greater for women due to their point of departure as disenfranchised, invisible members of the public. For example, in *Swallow,* when Tolani attends a church service with her colleague Godwin, she is unable to find the same comfort he does, as she cannot identify with a god so different from her as a poor Nigerian woman (226). Simone details the ways invisibility can prohibit people from finding meaning and stability in the city:
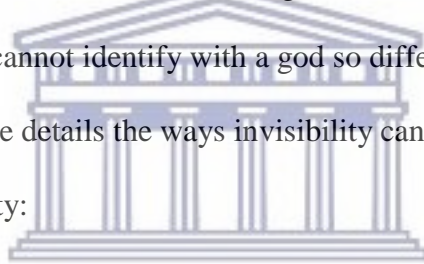
> Across urban Africa, there is persistent tension as to what is possible
> within the city and the appropriate forms of social connections through
> which such possibilities can be pursued. […] Making lives from the
> provisional is an essentially unstable process, and such instability can
> produce enormous creative change, but also devolve into spreading
> violence. (23-24)

That meaningful life in urban Africa is so elusive contributes to the forces of city space that shape patriarchal women. When dominant women perpetuate patriarchal structures within women's spaces, these spaces themselves do not offer respite from marginalisation, and do not create opportunities for women to claim parts of the city as their own. In villages,

entropic force is generally weaker, as it is primarily a characterisation of the urban milieu.

For example, in *Swallow,* Tolani's mother Arike is able to negotiate access to a motorcycle

for transport, and runs a successful business to support her household. However, specific

oppressive elements of tradition do have a stronger hold in this context. This is evident in

Tolani's parentage; Tolani's infertile father took mistresses in an attempt to produce a child,

and Arike was compelled to accept this as well as be secretly impregnated by her brother-in-

law to preserve her husband's honour (151, 294). It cannot be assumed that women in the

village have easier lives and face less oppression by virtue of the absence of urban entropy;

the mechanisms of patriarchal rule vary according to the socio-spatial context. Entropy will

therefore be discussed as a catalyst of oppression that operates in the city space, whereas

oppression in rural spaces will be discussed separately.

## Crossing Big Space: Mobility and Autonomy

The impact of entropic urban forces on women characters' lives can be read in their

traversal of space. Tolani and Rose's negotiation of Lagos in *Swallow* effectively captures the

complex and ambiguous nature of transport in the megacity. Like so many Lagosians, Tolani

and Rose make use of public transport to venture beyond their apartment. That a large portion

of the narrative takes place in transport spaces indicates how congestion and inconsistent

infrastructure make commuting a very time-consuming exercise. In fact, the text opens with

Tolani and Rose taking the bus to work, and they narrowly escape being in an accident when

the bus swerves to avoid a pedestrian:

> Rose and I were trembling by the rear window as the driver steered
>
> us back on course. We thought our bus was about to overturn. I caught a
>
> glimpse of the slow crosser; he was safely on the other side of the

expressway now and shaking his head as if someone else had almost caused

the accident. As usual, onlookers were gathering around the scene and

pointing. Within seconds, passengers on the bus were scrambling for seats

and the conductor was collecting fares as if nothing had happened. Even the

oranges were back in their basket, sitting upright like us. At that time of the

morning, our bus was full and once we recovered from the shock, we were

more concerned about having to stand than surviving the rest of the ride.

(8)

Tolani and Rose both display signs of shock, but the immediate scramble to return to

order demonstrates that being located in the public transport system for any length of time

requires resilience. Despite the danger of traversing the city on a daily basis, the women do so

because it takes them from their position of disadvantage and poverty on the margin, to the

centre of the city where they can earn a living and build careers. The physical distance

between their apartment and their source of income represents the difference between who

they are and who they aspire to be.
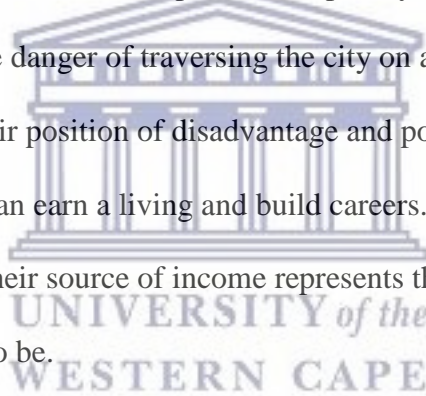
Although the public transport system is used by most of the Lagosian public, there is a

definite masculine character to it that is in line with the traditional male gendering of the

public sphere and the road. This is represented in the authority figures in control of the

system, such as the driver and conductor, as well as the male pedestrian for whom their bus

had to swerve. He crosses the busy expressway with no regard for the traffic, and does not

accelerate to yield to the approaching bus. What is more, once he reaches the opposite

sidewalk, he shows no sign of alarm or regret: "he was safely on the other side of the

expressway now and shaking his head as if someone else had almost caused the accident" (8).

As a man, the pedestrian does not fear the transport system – he moves freely within this

space, as it is part of his domain. This is consistent with the masculine character of Ogun, and is a point of confluence between Ogun's roles as the god of the road and the god of war. The pedestrian who walks across the street in front of the bus places the lives of women like Rose and Tolani at risk, who end up "trembling" (8) in a corner of the system – relegated to the margin at the mercy of others. The name of their bus, "Who knows tomorrow?" (19), encapsulates the risk and uncertainty of their daily commute. It reinforces Dunton's argument that Lagos is a city experiencing entropy within which characters struggle to create meaning. As Rose says, "you can die going to work by bus in this place" (205). Tolani and Rose's conflict with the patriarchal transport system therefore serves as allegory for the women's navigation of Lagos as a patriarchal big space. In the case of women such as Tolani and Rose, this force is a disempowering one that makes it unsafe for them to inhabit the space of public transport, and thereby traverse the space between themselves and socioeconomic progress.

The marginalisation of women in public transport spaces is also evident in the evasion tactics that Tolani and Rose develop to avoid the crowds. For women, who are generally physically weaker than men, it is easier to avoid other people than to compete for space. This evasion is so important that the journey between their work and home spaces becomes the focal point of their day, rather than the destinations themselves. It shapes their entire lives. Once they have completed the first segment of their journey – the walk from their flat and the *kabukabu* (unregistered taxi) – Tolani notes that their "scramble" begins at the bus stop (20). One would assume that their walk requires the most physical effort, but it is when they enter the formal public transport system that they have to exert themselves in competing for space:

> We elbowed and pushed people out of our way. We woke up early
>
> in the mornings to avoid the crowds. After work, the crowds were there,
>
> waiting for the same buses, heading in the same direction of the mainland.

Quarrels, plenty. Chaos, unbelievable. Sometimes, the police showed up

and horsewhipped people. They had always done that, but the

government's War Against Indiscipline gave them a legitimate reason.

Now, they could say it was part of their duties to ensure the public behaved

in an orderly fashion. They treated us like cattle. (20-21)

Their physical negotiation of the space exposes them to elbowing, pushing and

whipping – violence that gives men, with their larger bodies, a distinct advantage. The chaos

is framed as "indiscipline" by the police's act of horsewhipping and, as discussed in the

previous chapter, the government considers women to be responsible for civic indiscipline. In

this context, indiscipline is a result of people attempting to navigate the overcrowded space.

This problem is a direct result of the structure of the city, in which the disenfranchised people

on the margins have to travel to the centre to better their socio-economic position. Tolani

notes bitterly that they feel as if they are treated "like cattle" (21). The government's absolute

authority over how people interact with public space is dehumanising, and this experience

affects women more than men because of their physical disadvantage in competing for body

space as well as the government's focus on women as the perpetrators of indiscipline. As

discussed in the previous chapter, when Tolani attempts to resist this patriarchal force, she is

immediately silenced by those around her – most notably an old woman who tells her to save

her objections for her home space (190). While Tolani's and Rose's difficulties in accessing

transport results in relentless competition with other women that incites patriarchal

behaviour, their experience of this form of patriarchal womanhood is subtle and generally

manageable. Tolani's mother Arike, on the other hand, loses her mobility when a woman

uses patriarchal discourse to remove Arike's access to transport.

Arike's immobility is a result of the patriarchal forces enacted upon her in public

spaces by both men and women. Arike convinces her brother-in-law, Brother Tade, to give

her a Vespa by making him warm to the possible comedic value of her failing to ride it

successfully (127). She considers the likely reaction of the Makoku Town community at

seeing her ride a Vespa:

> If I didn't fall off the Vespa, the people might waylay me, drag me
>
> off, and beat me up for daring to ride. Not even my aunt Iya Alaro would
>
> come to my rescue this time. She believed there was women's business and
>
> men's business, and would protect any woman so long as she kept to
>
> women's business. She didn't approve of women crossing over to the
>
> men's arena and causing confusion. (129)

Iya Alaro, whom Arike mentions here, is characterised up to this point as the

emancipated, liberal woman in the family. However, the thought that Iya Alaro would not

have defended her riding a Vespa is proof to Arike that she cannot legitimately claim this

mode of transport as her own from her position as a woman. In this sense, the memory of Iya

Alaro's convictions is an obstacle to Arike's access to mobility as well as the economic

success she hopes to achieve. She describes Iya Alaro's objections in terms of spatial

traverse: she is not to "cross over to the men's arena" (129). Arike therefore stops trying to

lay a claim to her mobility from her position as a woman with agency, and comes up with

other, more patriarchal arguments to convince her family.

Despite this mental exercise, Arike's access to the Vespa is short-lived, likely as the

result of Brother Tade's wife, Sister Kunbi. During her first excursion from the compound,

she meets Sister Kunbi, whose disapproval is clear and cutting: "You, the junior wife of the

family, who hasn't even given birth […] rode a motorcycle here without your husband's consent? And I, the senior wife, cannot walk down the road without telling my husband where I'm going?" (130). Arike can sense the other woman's anger, and soon after, Brother Tade forbids her to ride the Vespa (152). Sister Kunbi shames Arike by implying that she is a failure as a woman, as she is insubordinate and is not producing children. There is clear envy in Sister Kunbi's comparison of her own freedom to Arike's, but she does not attribute her captive state to her husband's patriarchal rule. Instead, she blames Arike's transgressive behaviour for their differences in freedom of movement. Sister Kunbi utilises patriarchal norms in an attempt to enhance her own status within the family: she needs to modulate Arike's behaviour to the point where she has less freedom than Sister Kunbi as her senior counterpart. By adopting a patriarchal femininity, Sister Kunbi is able to maintain her senior status. As a result, Arike's access to bigger space is removed, and her mobility taken away. Once again contained in the smaller space of her compound, she returns to her domestic activities by sweeping the ground: "I made half-moon patterns in the soil, cleared my tire marks away and walked backward so my footprints would disappear" (153). Arike has not only lost her access to big space and faster transport, but also feels that she has been rendered invisible. She does not even leave her footprints as evidence of her crossing the small space of the compound. Instead she leaves only the tracks of the broom, signifying an enclosed, domestic femininity. Both Arike and her daughter Tolani use their respective modes of transport to facilitate their economic activities. The hindrance or removal of their access to transport jeopardises their financial security and stability. However, whereas her difficulty in accessing transport encourages patriarchal behaviour in Tolani, Arike's mobility is exploited as a mechanism of control over her by a patriarchal woman. In *The Tent,* Grandmother Hakima similarly controls women's mobility using patriarchal discourse.

The Tent does not engage city space or mobility to a significant extent, as it is a novel of captive space. Explorations of captivity are conducted in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis. What can be noted here is that the different levels of access women have to movement outside the home depends on their caste. Where female characters that are slaves, servants, peasants or gypsies have free reign, the Bedouin women characters are generally secured within domestic space. Fatima sees her sisters grow up not to move into the wider world of the village, but straight into the homes of their husbands. One important exception to this rule is the figure of Grandmother Hakima, whose mobility signifies her status as the patriarchal ruler of the household in her son's absence. Fatima describes her arrival with awe:

It was Grandmother Hakima who was coming in now. She too had

the main gate opened for her. Everyone was waiting. She was thin, lighter

than him. Gold-capped teeth shone in her mouth and it looked like the

mouth of a demon. Her dark-blue garment never changed. Only the cloak,

which she alone among the women wore, was ever different. Was she

really a woman? She was the mother of us all. Our great demon mother

who wrapped herself in men's scarves. She prodded her huge old mare.

(Al-Tahawy 11)

Despite being called the "mother" of the family by Fatima, Grandmother Hakima is mobile and has access to big space because she is the virtual patriarch of the home. This is why Fatima also describes her as a "great demon mother" and considers whether she is really a woman; Grandmother Hakima has powers beyond womanhood. She provides for everyone in the household – including her son – and maintains the order by monitoring food supplies, disciplining slaves and servants, arranging marriages and insulting the local peasant women into keeping their distance. She detests Fatima and her sisters and often expresses her

disappointment that they are not boys – she considers girls to be worthless. She carefully polices their modesty and captivity, and arranges and facilitates their marriages so that they may be subservient to husbands in new households. Inhabiting this position of power and oppressing other women affords her the right to wear a traveling cloak and scarf, and travel on horseback between homes.

Like Grandmother Hakima, Iya Segi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is the only woman in the home who is allowed independent transport, and she uses this to amass more power over the other women in the home. Iya Segi acquires a driver's license and car by convincing Baba Segi that it would aid her in running her business. The other wives are moved between locations by the driver, Taju, at Baba Segi's request; they have no agency or control over their movement. As Baba Segi's wealth originates from Iya Segi's business prowess, he allows her to drive in order to further expand his wealth. As a result, she is able to open new stores in various towns, increasing her authority in the household to the extent where she rivals Baba Segi's power. Her narrative indicates that mobility is a key contributor to a woman's capacity to maintain economic independence in an urban context. Iya Segi's ability to surpass Baba Segi's economic status through her access to transportation is foreshadowed on the day she travels with him from her hometown to his flat in Ibadan as his new bride: "As I prepared to accompany him to Ibadan the following day, I knew he didn't know the source of the money his mother had stuffed into a cash bag. From the way he held his head, it was clear he believed it was a great gift from his mother. On the bus to Ibadan, his arm rested on mine. It was as if someone had placed a twig on my wrist" (102). On their first journey together, Iya Segi's domestic environment is transferred from her mother's home to her new husband's. As Iya Segi and Baba Segi are transported on the bus together, it would seem that they start their marriage as equals where this element of power is concerned. This impression is reinforced by the fact that they hail from the same village. Baba Segi had not

been living in Ibadan for long, and therefore the imbalance between the rural and urban does not feature strongly in their union. However, what Baba Segi considers a monetary gift from his mother is in fact Iya Segi's earnings from her market activity. It is clear that as far as Iya Segi is concerned, the man next to her has acquired his wealth through her, and therefore she holds the traditionally male position of provider. This is evident in her description of his arm feeling like "a twig on [her] wrist" – she considers him to be weak and insignificant. Unfortunately – as discussed in more depth in the fourth chapter – Iya Segi uses the authority generated by her mobility and wealth to surpass her role as the senior wife and replace Baba Segi as the patriarch in the family. Her oppression of the junior wives utilises the patriarchal system and benefits the patriarchal order. This suggests that where a lack of mobility leads to women's vulnerability, access to it can also cause women to render other women more vulnerable. However, Iya Segi forfeits her independence and mobility at the end of the novel when she loses Baba Segi's trust and he transforms the home into a closed, captive space.

In direct contrast to Iya Segi, Bolanle experiences the impact of a lack of transport on a woman's safety to an extreme degree. When Bolanle is raped as a teenager and undergoes an abortion, her sexual assault is largely a result of her immobility. As a schoolgirl, she is picked up by her rapist on a day that the weather limits her access to taxis.[27] In her

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[27] In Nuruddin Farah's *Gifts*, the protagonist is negotiating Somali civil war conditions, and meets her partner when he pretends to be a taxi driver willing to give her transport to spare her the dangers of a woman being on the road alone in a volatile Mogadishu. Although she does not experience the trauma that Bolanle does, this further

vulnerability as a pedestrian in the rain, the space of her hometown becomes hostile to her. Bolanle cannot continue crossing the space to her home, and is rendered stationary under a tree as she waits for the rain to subside. Her umbrella is torn, and her clothing soaked (110), but she is vulnerable to more than the elements. She tries to reassure herself that this road is protected against criminal activity because "rich, decent people" live here (111). Being in the street as a young woman on her own – outside of the bounds of a private or known safe space – unnerves her. In spite of this, her biggest concern is the anger that her mother would express at her being home late. When a car pulls up next to her, she hopes that it is one of her school friends who could resolve her dilemma. When she does not recognise the driver, she takes "two steps back" to put distance between herself and the stranger, a result of the instinct that she has had to develop while moving in public space as a woman (111). Despite this conditioning, the thought of her mother's anger contributes significantly to her decision to climb into the car with the strange man. After the driver traps Bolanle in his house and sexually assaults her, she once again has to drive with him, having no other recourse. She does not recognise herself in the rear-view mirror, and asks her reflection, "Who are you?" As a result of her lack of mobility and ability to move independently within public space, she loses not only her agency but also her very identity. She asks her rapist to allow her to walk the last few blocks, reasoning that this will grant her some time to compose herself (116), but the short distance across which she is able to regain control of her mobility does not restore her agency or identity. In strong contrast to Iya Segi's position, Bolanle's lack of mobility as

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suggests that women are at the mercy of men due to their lack of access to independent transport.

a woman, and the further limitations her mother places on her freedom of movement, cause her constantly to have to put herself in danger when she wishes to move. Although she does not have her own car or driver's license like Iya Segi, Nabilah in *Lyrics Alley* also has a greater degree of mobility than her co-wife does.

Although mobility does not play a significant role in *Lyrics Alley,* where the majority of the action centres on multiscalar representations of national space, some relevant observations can be made. Nabilah is Mahmoud Abuzeid's new young wife, and hails from the more metropolitan context of Cairo. As a result, Nabilah has more freedom than the Sudanese women in the text. Nabilah is allowed to use public transport unaccompanied and can visit public spaces such as shops and cinemas alone. However, her marriage to Mahmoud does impact her mobility in the sense that she is required to accompany him to any of the social spaces he attends. In spite of this, she is still more mobile than her co-wife in Umdurman. Waheeba is so unaccustomed to moving beyond the *saraya* that she struggles to visit her son Nur after his accident. When she finally arrives in Alexandria, she is hysterical. Waheeba's immobility contributes significantly to Mahmoud's decision to have Nabilah support Nur during his surgery in London instead of Waheeba. As discussed in the previous chapter, Nabilah engineers and revels in this arrangement, rather than supporting or helping her co-wife to adjust to moving between big spaces. Although Mahmoud and the patriarchy remain the primary oppressors, Nabilah leverages this system as a patriarchal woman to oppress and hurt her co-wife.

In summary, women lack access to mobility in urban, suburban and rural spaces alike due to the patriarchal structures within these spaces. In the city, urban entropic force affects women more than men, causing women to compete with one another for space during the commute to the centre of the city. This struggle is represented in Tolani's encounters with

public transport in Lagos, which involve physical and symbolic oppression. Tolani's mother Arike's loss of her Vespa due to her Sister Kunbi's envy and patriarchal views of womanhood demonstrates how women can also hinder one another's access to transport in rural contexts. Grandmother Hakima similarly uses patriarchal discourse to restrict other women's mobility. She is the only woman in *The Tent* with access to big space due to her patriarchal power, and further ensures that the other women in the household remain immobile. Like Grandmother Hakima, both Iya Segi and Nabilah use their increased mobility to oppress other women in their households rather than attempting to share their freedom with them. These narratives suggest that women can align with patriarchal in order to restrict other women's freedom of movement.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, women's reinforcement of the gender hierarchy in urban and rural contexts contradicts claims by scholars such as Rose Sackeyfio, who in "Recasting Sisterhood and its Ambiguities: Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow,*" claims that women establish supportive women's networks that help them to counter Nigerian patriarchal systems. This chapter shows that patriarchal urban and rural spaces can produce women that rather reinforce and exploit patriarchal systems in their oppression of one another, and that women may also use space as a tool in this endeavour. The examples in this chapter also illuminate patterns contrary to those that Sorcha Gunne identifies in her analysis of patriarchal travel space on trains in Miriam Tlali's *Footprints in the Quag: Stories and Dialogues from Soweto.* Gunne argues that women can reclaim space from "the state and patriarchal dominance" (xv) when they transform the space to protect one another against gender-based violence. However, the examples in this chapter show that urban and rural spaces and transport infrastructure foster patriarchal femininities that oppress
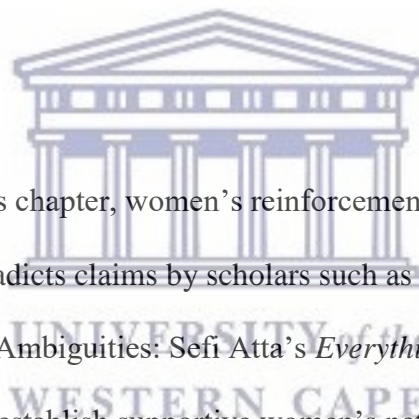
other women. Tolani and Rose's experience in *Swallow* offers a view of how entropic city space, situated in a larger patriarchal context, can produce patriarchal behaviour in women. Sister Kunbi, also in *Swallow,* and Grandmother Hakima in *The Tent* both demonstrate how patriarchal women can use patriarchal discours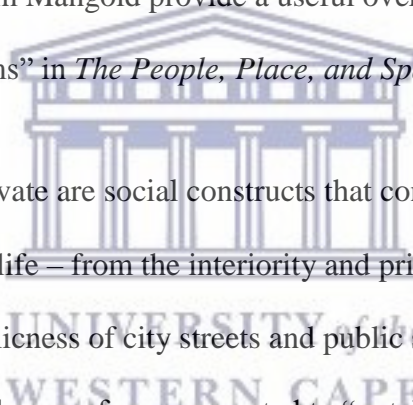e to control other women's mobility. Grandmother Hakima and Iya Segi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* are both the only fully mobile women in their households due to their status as patriarchs by proxy. Rather than using this resource to support other women and resist patriarchy, both of them use their mobility to amass more power with which to oppress the other women through patriarchal means. In the chapter to follow, the spatial oppression of women by patriarchal femininities is explored in private-public places. These places, which are defined in the next chapter, form the intermediary space between the city and domestic space. I focus on representations of such places that are predominantly populated by women, and therefore are often sites which maintain hegemonic femininities. Places such as the hair salon, maternity clinic and the women's cooperative will be examined in depth to discover the ways in which patriarchal women can use even these spaces, often considered feminine places, to police other women's identities.
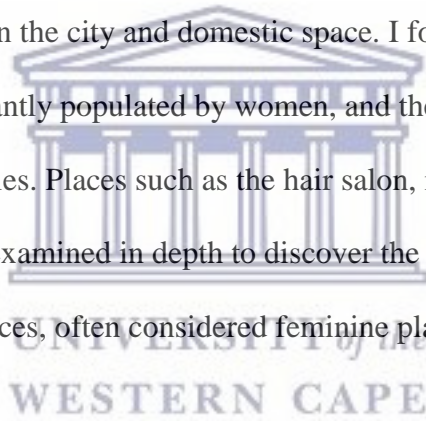
Chapter 3: Private-Public Places and the Construction of Femininities

Introduction

Within the urban and rural big spaces discussed in the previous chapter, there are specific places that serve as intermediaries between big space and domestic places. These liminal spaces, such as salons, community centres and educational institutions, are usually presented as liberatory, but these texts demonstrate how smaller, complex private-public spaces where women oppress other women translate male patriarchy into patriarchal femininity. Definitions of private and public space differ depending on the application, but Jen Jack Gieseking and William Mangold provide a useful overview of the terms in "Section 6: 'Public' and 'Private' Realms" in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*:

> Public and private are social constructs that conceptualize different
> domains of everyday life – from the interiority and privacy of our bodies
> and homes to the publicness of city streets and public space. In common
> usage it refers to the degree of access granted to "outsiders", however
> outsiders are defined. But despite digital privacy agreements and no-
> trespassing signs, the boundaries between public and private are often ill-
> defined and contested. Rather than existing in a binary opposition, public
> and private spaces operate at a variety of scales that overlap and intersect,
> creating a mosaic of spaces and degrees of access. Rarely is a space either
> public or private, but is instead multi-layered and often disputed physically
> and politically. (29)

As will be discussed in more detail later, the division between public and private space is not only dependent on the socio-cultural context, but – as Gieseking and Mangold point out – is also not a clear binary. In light of the fact that private and public spaces contain elements of each other, I define private-public places as those places in which the distinction between private and public is effaced to the extent that neither can be considered the primary lens through which to view the place. It is neither mostly private nor mostly public, but falls in the centre of the spectrum between the two concepts. Although "private-public" and "public-private" places could be understood as interchangeable terms, I shall refer primarily to "private-public" places, as the places under discussion are privately owned and therefore not public spaces strictly speaking. Such places are therefore simultaneously private and public due to their functions as loci of personal transactional behaviours. The hair salon in *Swallow*, for example, is a business, yet the services performed there – grooming women's bodies – are private or domestic in nature. In this chapter, I examine how various homosocial private-public places produce patriarchal femininities that disempower women. As a point of departure, a number of key paradigms through which to read private-public places will be considered. The first of these is the gendered understanding of private space and public space, and how the intersection of these in private-public place can be read. The second paradigm borrows from Immanuel Wallerstein's discussion of semiperipheral space as part of his world-systems theory, and Robert Tally's reinterpretation of this. Lastly, the concept of community as defined by Homi Bhabha – an intermediary space between the civil and the familial – is discussed through the lens of private-public space. With this theoretical foundation established, key private-public places from *The Tent* (1998), *Swallow* (2011) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) are analysed to determine how patriarchal women use them to oppress other women. In *Lyrics Alley* (2010)*, the only private-public places of interest in Umdurman are the school and university attended by Soraya. Although

there are multiple such places in Cairo, such as the market, clubs and the movie theatre,

Nabilah's interactions with these places are mostly solitary, and do not reveal power

dynamics relevant for discussion. For this reason, *Lyrics Alley* will not form part of this

chapter's discussion.

The literary places selected for discussion as private-public places in this chapter vary

in terms of use, function and the people who are accommodated in the space. The point of

departure is the hospital as a heterotopic space in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. St

Gabriel's ultrasound constructs patriarchal hegemonic femininity by equating womanhood

with fertility and bodiliness, which defines the women in the hospital as objects. This is

exacerbated by the fact that the patriarchal government deprives women of adequate

women's health infrastructure, which creates competition for resources among women. As a

result, the women in the hospital come to view one another as objects, removing one

another's agency. After this discussion of the hospital space, the hair salon in *Swallow* is

examined as a place that produces femininities that are attractive to men, which leads to

women within that space policing one another's bodies. With reference to Iya Femi's role as

a houseworker in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the domestic space is then discussed

as a place of work that fosters patriarchal femininity in the woman of the house, as she uses

existing tropes of female servitude as well as the space of the home itself to oppress Iya Femi.

Lastly, the imaginary desert that Fatima creates in *The Tent* is examined as a form of revolt

against her captivity by a female patriarch.

Apart from domestic places, private-public places are the most prevalent locations

represented in *Swallow*. Friends Tolani and Rose spend most of their time at work in the bank

on Lagos Island, or at their own apartment. Whatever time remains in their day is usually

spent in intermediate transport spaces. After Rose is dismissed from her position as a

secretary, she moves mostly between the flat she shares with Tolani and the home of her new lover, OC. The remaining places that Tolani and Rose visit are largely what will later be defined as private-public places. Key among these is the hair salon called Simpatico, owned by Rose's sister, Violet. The women also visit Tajudeen market on their shopping trips, and mention a club called Phaze Two, which they frequent on ladies' night. At the end of the novel, Rose dies tragically in the Lagos airport, and Tolani goes home to heal in Makoku Town where she grew up. Interspersed with Tolani's story is that of her mother Arike in Makoku Town, which also centers on her home or her place of work in the market.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the geography of the narrative similarly centres on domestic spaces. The four co-wives who share the Alao household – Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi and Bolanle – all hail from different family homes and towns. The focal private-public spaces in this text are medical facilities. As a young girl, Bolanle visits an informal abortion clinic after falling pregnant, possibly as a result of her sexual assault. As an adult, she visits the University College Hospital (UCH) and St Gabriel's Ultrasound to investigate why she is failing to conceive, despite Baba Segi's concerted efforts to impregnate her. The other wives are aware that this is a result of Baba Segi's infertility, as they have all had secret extramarital relations in order to conceive their children. As such, Bolanle's status as a "graduate", an educated person, and visits to medical facilities pose a threat to the other wives: they fear that their secret will be exposed. Ultimately, the other wives attempt to poison Bolanle, and as a result accidentally poison the eldest child, Segi, instead. Segi is then also rushed to the hospital, and forms a strong bond with Bolanle before her eventual death.

Of the four texts under discussion, *The Tent* is the most spatially contained narrative. Aside from her sisters' weddings and a visit to the British neighbour Anne's home, Fatima

never leaves the house in which she grows up. As she is the protagonist and only focaliser, the reader may share in her claustrophobia. Owing to her confinement, Fatima does not visit private-public places as the characters in the other novels do. She does, however, find another escape in the vast desert space she creates in her mind. From the folk tales that her servant, Sardoub, tells her, Fatima creates another world in which she can live with a nomadic community in an oasis in the desert. Her imaginary companions, Musallam, Sigeema and Zahwa, live in Fatima's desert, and at times act as mirrors of herself, her father and her mother. This mental geography becomes so realistic to Fatima that she loses the ability to distinguish between real and imagined space. Consequently, the reader, too, is spatially disoriented. The desert is superimposed on Fatima's physical domestic space so that the real world and the imaginary world are no longer separated. Although Fatima's imagined desert is not a private-public space in the same manner as the other spaces in this discussion, it is nevertheless a liminal, public space that she created for herself. However, despite being an avenue of escape and mobility, Fatima's imaginary desert space is not emancipatory, but mirrors the same oppressive structures as her physical world. To explore this and the other textual places mentioned above, the concepts of semiperipheral and private-public place require investigation.

Reading Semiperipheral Places

In the previous chapter, I explored the division of space between a centre, semiperiphery and periphery as defined in Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System*. Where Wallerstein's work maps power-balances between nations, Tally in *Spatiality* suggests that this structure can also be applied within a nation, where the city functions as the centre, and the rural as the peripheral space (91). Tally also somewhat tentatively proposes the suburban as the "intermediary", semiperipheral space (91). This further classification can

be used effectively to consider African national space, as the semiperiphery then physically

occupies the space between the city and rural space. [28] To revisit Wallerstein's definition of

the semiperiphery:

> There are also semiperipheral areas which are in between the core and
> the periphery on a series of dimensions, such as the complexity of economic
> activities, strength of the state machinery, cultural integrity, etc. Some of these
> areas had been core-areas of earlier versions of a given world-economy. Some
> had been peripheral areas that were later promoted, so to speak, as a result of
> the changing geopolitics of an expanding world-economy. (349)

In this definition, Wallerstein's emphasis is on the power relations between spaces

based on economic and cultural factors. Tally's proposition that suburbs or neighbourhoods

occupy the semiperiphery at the national scale does have some value here. The

neighbourhood, with its societies and domestic services such as babysitting, cleaning and hair

styling, does somewhat allow for economic and cultural translation from Tally's centre,

which is the city, to the peripheral rural areas. However, when considering space at a smaller

scale, as within rural towns, the market space also functions as a centre, and the

neighbourhoods as peripheral. When studying private-public spaces, Wallerstein's system

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[28] This is only the case if the term "suburbs" is extended to include lower-income and

informal housing areas, as these spaces tend to occupy the outermost periphery of the city. As

discussed in the previous chapter, most African cities comprise former colonial business core,

the wealthy enclaves of the super-elite, and the low-income informal housing areas at the

periphery. Middle-class suburban life is often absent.

therefore needs to be applied at the scale of the town or city, rather than at the national scale as with Tally's adaptation. When each town or city is considered through Wallerstein's lens, buildings or structures that facilitate and embody state power and capital occupy the centre. Examples include banks, transport hubs and administrative buildings. In many cases, the wealthy enclaves closer to the city centre are middle or upper class, whereas the slums and low-income districts occupy the outer periphery of the city or town. The liminal or semiperipheral space, which creates slippage[29] between these spheres, remains to be defined. For the purposes of this discussion, the semiperiphery comprises not the suburbs, but rather private-public places, as these combine the concerns of the centre – the public sphere – with the periphery – the people. Such private-public spaces are mostly, as in Tally's model, located in suburbs or communities.
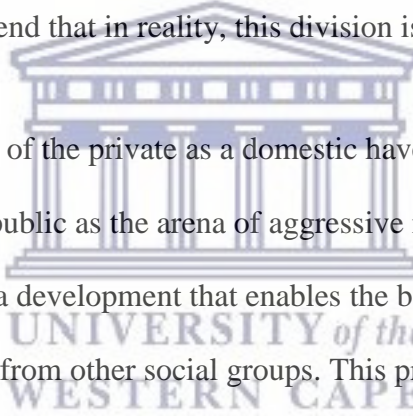
Intersections of Private and Public Places

As discussed in the introductory chapter, feminist critical theory has historically focussed on the gendered division of public and private space. Although the concept of the public sphere emerged during the Enlightenment and was subsequently developed by philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Nancy Fraser, the seminal work for understanding the intersection between the public sphere and public spaces is Jürgen Habermas' 1962 text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois*

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[29] That is not to say that there is no movement between the centre and periphery without the mediation of a semiperiphery – Tally notes that Wallerstein, Edward Said and other commentators have emphasised the ways the three "spatio-political zones" interact through political, economic, literary and cultural movement (Tally 91).

Society. Habermas maps the public sphere from its Hellenic origins through its growing

institutionalisation and association with the bourgeoisie since the Renaissance. Habermas

disambiguates the public sphere and different understandings of "public space". For

Habermas, public spaces are non-exclusive and therefore accessible to all, or, in some cases,

they are spaces that specifically house state institutions (1-2). The public sphere, conceived of

as the "sphere of public people come together as a public", engages structures of authority

over civil matters (27). For Habermas, this is the realm of the male bourgeoisie, produced in a

variety of what I call private-public spaces, such as coffee shops and salons (33). The

importance of such public-sphere places lies in the critical debates that lead to resistance to

state power through the fostering of a robust civic political energy. In some ways, Habermas'

public sphere as it unfolds in private-public space is therefore contrary to the private-public

places examined in this chapter. For one thing, the places in question are populated by

women, whereas in Habermas' original formulation, the public sphere is a space for men – no

subaltern voices are present. Furthermore, private-public spaces, such as the hospital and hair

salon here discussed, also differ from Habermas' in that they are penetrated by state authority

and thus produce women who do not resist this influence – as in the case of Habermas'

bourgeoisie – but perpetuate, maintain and reinforce the patriarchal national power structures.

Private-public space as discussed in this chapter therefore introduces contrary notions to

Habermas' public sphere as a realm of resistance to state authority.

For the study of the spaces that shape patriarchal femininity in these texts, the

classical understanding of public spheres and public space is also not as useful, as my

conception of private-public space allows for slippage within the arbitrary dichotomy of

private and public. For example, in *Swallow,* the market in Makoku Town functions as an in-

between space where domestic activities such as grocery shopping are conducted. Many of

the goods for sale are also produced through domestic or women's activities such as sewing

and baking. In many feminist literatures, especially African feminist literature, places like the

market can function as a locale of women's support and solidarity. In *Swallow,* however, the

market is presented as a hostile place fraught with jealousy and competition for resources. In

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives, the hospital and maternity clinic are further examples

of liminal places, where the state provides a service to diagnose, categorise and maintain

women's bodies. Although privately owned, domestic space can also be a private-public

place for characters for whom it is a locus of economic activity. Examples of such women are

cleaning staff, child-minders and the Victorian figure of the governess.[30] In Alison Blunt and

Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, the

authors use such liminal places to criticise the way the dualism of public and private has been

universally applied. They contend that in reality, this division is Eurocentric:

> The elaboration of the private as a domestic haven of feminine grace
>
> and charm, and of the public as the arena of aggressive masculine competition,
>
> is increasingly seen as a development that enables the bourgeoisie to
>
> distinguish themselves from other social groups. This project of distinction
>
> was as much material as symbolic; the suburban villa was intended to be the
>
> site of private domesticity triumphant, inscribing in bricks and mortar the
>
> values of middle-class familial order. And if the distinction between the public
>
> and the private must be seen as specific in terms of class, so too it must be

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[30] Seminal in this respect is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the*

Attic, which traces the use of places within the home to exclude and confine transgressive

femininities.

understood as specific in terms of race. Several black feminist historians have

also pointed out that the valorisation of the difference between the public and

the private must be seen as central to the constitution of the 19th-century

middle class as white. (Blunt and Rose 3-4)

As Blunt and Rose point out, the division between the private and the public is

specific to the 19th century bourgeoisie, and therefore cannot be applied unquestioned to the

narratives of African women. For example, in "Response: Rethinking the Public/Private",

Simon Gikandi recalls how the apartheid state in South Africa was unique in its control of

both public and private space. Through managing aspects of experience such as sexuality and

family life, the state "colonised" the private sphere despite the fact that it is "supposed to be

driven by desire and to operate outside the regulatory order" (487).[31] In many cultures,

women in lower classes perform domestic functions – constructed by Western feminism as

private-sphere activities – for money. The place in which they perform these services is thus a

public-sphere place, which renders it more vulnerable to the power imbalances engendered

by global capitalism and state intervention. Similarly, private and public are also differently

delineated in different African cultures; for example, the seclusion of women is mostly

characteristic of Arab-influenced societies – this will be elaborated upon in the discussion of

domestic spaces in the chapter to follow. Another approach to considering the private-public

semiperiphery is through the lens of community. Although not all private-public places are

necessarily community spaces, the reverse is usually the case. What is of most importance

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[31] This is not to say that state power does not function with more force in public

spaces, where its access and level of control can be absolute.

here is that both private-public places and community spaces are kinds of semiperipheral

places within the context of a specific town or city.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that the community is the mediator

between the "civil and the familial" (231). With substantiating arguments from Partha

Chatterjee, Bhabha posits that community has an important creative function in collapsing the

binary of private and public. The community[32] asserts the impossibility of definitively

distinguishing between these spheres: "Community disturbs the grand globalising narrative of

capital, displaces the emphasis on production in 'class' collectivity, and disrupts the

homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation" (231). Bhabha illuminates the

potential for community to disrupt not only the division between "the civil and the familial"

(231) mentioned earlier, but also the grand narratives that otherwise shape public and private

space. Bhabha's community performs a similar role to Habermas' public sphere as it provides

a space for resistance against homogenising systems of power. Whereas the public sphere is

designed for the "master subject" and aims to balance national power, Bhabha's community

challenges both national and global power, and includes subaltern voices. As groups based on

cultural affiliation, proximity and general neighbourliness, communities disrupt the construct

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[32] Although it is not pertinent to the use of the term in this chapter, it should be noted

that communities can exist on multiple geographic scales. In "Against the Local Trap: Scale

and the Study of Environment and Development", Mark Purcell and Christopher Brown posit

that a "global 'community' is just as conceivable and desirable as a local one" (283).

of class-division[33], thereby displacing the hold that capitalist homogenisation has on

individual identities and interpersonal affiliation. The same goes for the homogenising power

of the "imagined community of the nation". As discussed in Chapter 1, the creation of an

implied national culture generates the "us" and "them" mentality that spawns xenophobia,

marginalisation and the exploitation of migrant workers. The community, by creating

belonging that is independent of the national narrative, can legitimise cultural difference

between groups that co-exist within the same national borders. For Bhabha and Chatterjee,

this is of particular significance in the context of diasporic communities as well as

postcolonial societies. Communities can serve as culturally seceded spaces that allow

members to reject their membership to "the civil society of subjects" and practice their own

distinctive material and spiritual cultures (231). In this context, the community is understood

as the domain of minority groups within metropolitan spaces – the margin that threatens the

civil centre (231). Indeed, in "Popular Shaping of Metropolitan Forms and Processes in

Nigeria: Glimpses and Interpretations from an Informed Lagosian", Babatunde Ahonsi notes

that neighbourhoods are developed into safer spaces with stronger economies and better

infrastructure by "Community Development Associations" (148). Many of the places

discussed in this chapter perform the above functions for the communities of women within

their respective cities and villages. These liminal, socio-culturally secluded spaces
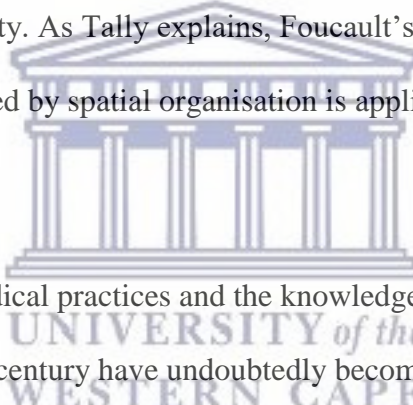
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[33] This is not always the case. Rita Nnodim provides a good example of how

neighbourhood-based association can reinforce class divisions in her analysis of Sefi Atta's

Everything Good Will Come. Nnodim notes that the characters based in "Sunrise Estate"

discuss "cars and money", as "consumerism is the natural expression of the inhabitants'

privileged position" (Nnodim 105).

supposedly enable women to practice social rituals in the absence of men, who largely

control their more strictly defined public and private spaces. However, as will become clear

in the rest of this discussion, this is not necessarily the case. Some community spaces are

configured to maintain rather than counter patriarchal structures. As with Habermas' public

sphere in private-public spaces, Bhabha's community space does not always counter state

authority, but may reinforce it. For example, the hospital that Bolanle visits is a women's

private-public space, but within it patriarchal power pervades.

The Hospital

As a place of healing, the hospital space often contains associations of the weak and

compromised. For this reason, there is a particular power dynamic between the medical site

and the rest of the city: the former is where the unhealthy, pathological or vulnerable are

treated so that they may conform to what society deems acceptable. In *The Secret Lives of

Baba Segi's Wives,* Bolanle is sent to these places because she is not meeting societal

expectations of womanhood when it comes to childbearing. In "Of Other Spaces", Michel

Foucault conducts a spatial analysis of power, with a particular focus on spaces to which

deviant members of society are exiled or within which they are enclosed. For Tally,

Foucault's work is particularly significant due to its illustration of the "emergence of an

increasingly spatialized organization of social forces", leading to the "scientific distribution

and codification of individuals in space" (Tally 124). Tally notes the importance of

Foucault's work on space and power for literary criticism, stating that although his

"cartographies of power" emerge from his study of specific examples in the asylum, clinic

and prison, the analyses also "expand into a broader social sphere where the spatial relations

of power become visible throughout the social body, and such spatial relations affect the

determination of both 'the normal' and 'the pathological'" (121). Although Bolanle is not

placed in the clinic or hospital on a permanent, live-in basis like the subjects in Foucault's

heterotopic spaces, she is nevertheless marked as "pathological" through the spatial

organisation that Tally describes. Furthermore, although Foucault describes these

"heterotopias" – sites where deviant members of the population are held – as closed off to the

general public, they nevertheless "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both

isolates them and makes them penetrable" (Foucault 26). They can therefore also be spaces

that are accessible only to those members of the population who are required to attend them.

Therefore, although the hospital and clinic as represented in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's*

Wives are not entirely aligned with Foucault's conception of the classic heterotopic space,

they can nevertheless be read as similarly isolated places intended for the deviant or

pathological members of society. As Tally explains, Foucault's point about the power

relations created and maintained by spatial organisation is applicable to broader society as

well:

> To be sure, medical practices and the knowledge to be gained through
> them in the nineteenth century have undoubtedly become more centralized in
> the form of the state regulation and a bio-political power/knowledge complex,
> but here Foucault indicates the degree to which the spatial organization of
> individuals in society had less to do with confinement and more to do with
> distribution. Under the regime of the healthy society, individuals were subject
> to increased regulation and registration, located in identifiable places,
> monitored, and catalogued, but without their necessarily being sequestered in a
> particular location. (Tally 125)

The distribution of the population in spaces according to their health is therefore not

necessarily a matter of being "sequestered" but rather of being regulated, registered,

monitored and catalogued in "identifiable places" (125). Tally also mentions the state's role

in the control of "bio-political power/knowledge" (125). Although these terms are not

sufficiently relevant to unpack here fully, it is important to note that state control over

medical resources gives it immense power over the population. When citizens' very lives are

at stake and they do not have the knowledge (and therefore power) to heal themselves, they

are at the mercy of state regulation and resources. In the discussion of the text to follow, the

gendered nature of this biological control will be examined.

Bolanle's apparent failure to bear Baba Segi's children is coded as pathological in the

text due to the importance placed on motherhood in both patriarchal and economic terms.

Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi notes that, although traditional Marxism argues that the "women's

work" of biological reproduction is unremunerated and considered to have only use-value, in

public spaces it can acquire a surplus-value. Women who reproduce successfully are

rewarded with "a social status that is directly linked not only to the womb as agent of

reproduction but one that also controls the numbers produced, and the socio-political

functions / benefits ascribed to the womb" (105). The women who produce children enjoy

certain socio-cultural benefits within private as well as public spaces. The women who do not

produce children – or do not produce an adequate number or the preferred gender – are

excluded from certain privileges, and "positioned as inappropriate Others, as women who

have no rights within the public sphere" (105). It also seems to be the case in many narratives

that the cause of childlessness is irrelevant – whether it is a result of an individual choice or

infertility on the man's or woman's part, the consequences of childlessness are to be borne

unequally by the woman, as the duty of reproduction lies with her. This is particularly evident

in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* in the three visits that Bolanle pays to medical

centres in relation to childbearing, as well as the contrast in Baba Segi's treatment of the

three senior wives, who are all mothers, with his treatment of Bolanle.[34] Although the latter will be discussed in the chapter to follow, the former will be discussed here.

The medical spaces that Bolanle visits – University College Hospital (UCH), St Gabriel's Ultrasound, as well as the nurse's hut in which her abortion was performed[35] – all define her femininity in terms of motherhood. Bolanle attended all three of these places at the request of a man. She underwent an abortion because her pregnancy was likely a result of rape, but also because her boyfriend at the time feared that a baby would reveal their secret relationship – Bolanle was too low-class for him to be associated with. Where the hospitals are concerned, Bolanle's visits were orchestrated by Baba Segi to determine why they could not conceive. Rather than consulting with a traditional healer-practitioner as he would likely have done for his other three wives, Baba Segi and his male advisors identify the hospital as the appropriate space within which to address Bolanle's infertility due to her status as a graduate. The fact that she is educated seems to foster an assumption that she is also

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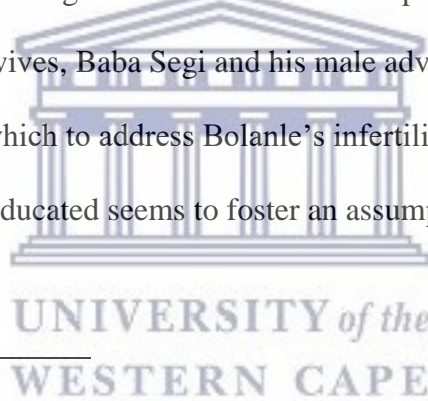
[34] A similar sentiment is suggested in *Swallow* when Tolani's mother Arike is blamed for her childlessness, despite the fact that her husband's infertility is an open secret in the family.

[35] Bolanle's abortion is perhaps her most transgressive act in the text, as it is an ultimate affront to patriarchal expectations of womanhood as fertile and maternal. When Baba Segi sees images of fetuses on the television at the beginning of the novel, he becomes so upset that he is violently ill. The nurse's hut where Bolanle's abortion is performed is therefore at the ultimate margins of society as a transgressive space within which the patriarchal reinforcement of this hegemonic femininity cannot operate.

insubordinate, and "will only listen to" or obey other formally educated people. Her

infertility, too, is considered insubordination, and the hospital as the appropriate form of

discipline – the space that will cure her deviance. Bolanle's experience demonstrates how

hospital space manifests and maintains patriarchal power. Baba Segi accompanies her for the

first hospital visit, as this is his disciplinary procedure to address her infertility. In keeping

with this removal of Bolanle's agency, the chapter is focalised by her but narrated by the

omniscient narrator. The hospital itself is in a terrible state:

> The lack of government funding, coupled with the misappropriation of
>
> the little the hospital generated, had left the buildings dilapidated. Crucial
>
> medical tests were rationed and the doctors refused to treat patients who
>
> hadn't brought their own medicine. The only reason people went there rather
>
> than to the thousands of back-alley clinics was that they could be sure the
>
> doctors had proper medical degrees. (30)
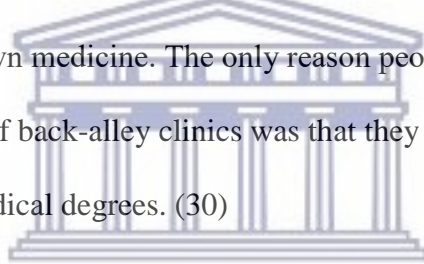
The lack of funding from the patriarchal, autocratic government indicates little respect

for the institution that maintains the biological health of the population. As demonstrated in

the discussion of Foucault's "Of Other Spaces", state control of medical resources is an

important source of its power, as access to healthcare may determine one's survival.

Considering the traditional association of the body with the female and the rational mind with

the male, the degeneration of the hospital space as the custodian of the body is indicative of

the status of women in Nigerian society. This impression is further reinforced by the

dilapidated condition of St Gabriel's Ultrasound, the maternity clinic that Bolanle visits

subsequently. Much like Bolanle's own body and the damage it suffered through sexual

abuse and her abortion, this hospital embodies the violence imposed on women and women's

bodies. The mourners that line the entrance to St Gabriel's Ultrasound (30) encapsulate the

building's disrepair and dysfunction – it is not primarily a place of healing as intended, but a place of death and misery.

During her follow-up visit to St Gabriel's Ultrasound, Bolanle experiences as much patriarchal oppression in this second medical private-public space. From the moment of her entrance, it is clear that, unlike UCH, this is a women's place. It is located in a compound (107), which is a women's domain due to its associations with the domestic. Bolanle, however, has been sentenced to this building as a result of her assumed infertility, and from her perspective, the building resembles a prison:

> The front wall was decorated with large stones cemented together so it looked as if the building had been sculpted from a mountain of granite. From the gate, I saw women sitting on benches, their backs leaning heavily against the iron railings that enclosed the balcony. There was a chemist on the ground floor where a garage should have been but no windows shed light on the boxes of tablets bundled together on the shelves. It looked dark and dingy. (107)

The imposing "granite" exterior, "iron railings" that enclose the balcony and windowless walls combine to create a claustrophobic, prison-like structure. Bolanle's perception of the building translates into her interaction with it. She ignores the woman who offers her water, and instead of walking through the compound to the particular building in which she is to be treated, she takes a taxi directly to the door, which she admits must seem like an "extravagance" to the taxi driver (107). At the entrance, Bolanle describes the stairs as "steep and cumbersomely coiled" (107), reinforcing the claustrophobic atmosphere. Her apprehension also extends to the mothers and mothers-to-be that occupy the space. Bolanle does not identify with the women she encounters within the building; she describes them as if

they were objects. They have "different heights, different widths, stages of pregnancy, all of them huffing and puffing", and to Bolanle they look as though they are "set to leak from every orifice and flood the faded rubber tiles" (107). She defines these women by their rough shapes and then draws the focus to their particular bodiliness. Their pregnant bodies – and their presence within this imposing building as a result thereof – reduce them to a collection of their most visceral bodily functions in Bolanle's eyes. What is more, at this stage the reader is also acquainted with Bolanle's fraught relationship with childbearing; she has already endured the traumatic termination of an unwanted pregnancy in her youth, and now her assumed infertility is seen as an affront to her husband.

Despite her history of negative medical experiences, Bolanle's perspective of St Gabriel's Ultrasound as oppressive is not hyperbolic, as the place is inherently patriarchal. The state's control over medical resources, combined with its contempt for women, has resulted in insufficient care for these women despite the high value placed on motherhood and childbearing. The women also embody and maintain the patriarchal concerns that the space advances. Due to the clinic's disrepair and insufficient resources, the women are placed in competition with one another. As Bolanle notices and describes the bodily discomfort that results from this, her claustrophobic descriptions become short and anxious. She studies the waiting room through the windows before daring to enter: "Every space on every bench was taken. Beside a wooden counter, a door opened into a corridor. I looked down the passage. There were two doors on either side; three were signposted with doctors' names, one was badly labelled TOILET. There was a small queue at each door but no less than nine women clenched their thighs outside the lavatory" (107). The repetition of "every" in "every space" and "every bench" suggests that, although Bolanle lives in a generally crowded city, the busy hospital is extreme enough to still surprise her. The women in this space are mostly pregnant, which, based on the privilege that pregnant women and mothers receive in Bolanle's and

other societies, creates the expectation that they would be provided with care and comfort.
The juxtaposition of these vulnerable women with the space in which they are to receive care
is jarring. The ways their mostly pregnant bodies hold them hostage are emphasised through
the inclusion of "no less than" in her count of "no less than nine women" who "clenched their
thighs" outside the bathroom. When she finally manages to sit down in the queue for her
doctor, Bolanle compares her own body with those of the women around her. Again, her
descriptions of the women emphasise their bodies and what she considers to be their less-
than-flattering features, including their "flattened nostrils" and their "swollen ankles" that are
displayed (109). She notes that she does not have enough cushioning in her own buttocks to
tolerate the hard wooden benches as the other women do (109). The women's bodies in the
crowded space create a chaos that renders the women disempowered objects at the mercy of
the state and the limited resources it grants them. Despite her own objectification by the state
and also being denied acceptable healthcare, Bolanle participates in the state's
disempowerment of women by also viewing the women as objects. The hospital site and the
competition it creates coerces Bolanle into contributing to the maintenance of these
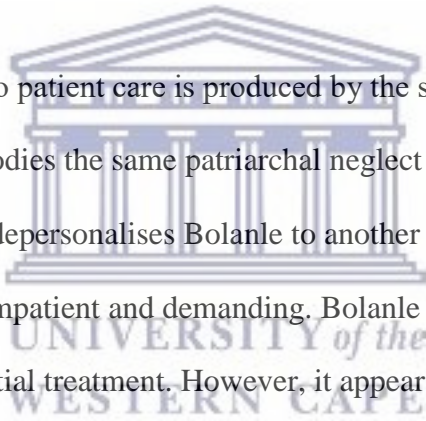patriarchal values.

Aside from the physical competition that other women present at this site of
deprivation and Bolanle's participation in their objectification, Bolanle also experiences her
own disempowerment in her interactions with these women. It becomes clear that from
Bolanle's perspective, the nurse treats her as if she does not belong there. Although the
nurse's instructions are likely something she repeats to every patient, Bolanle considers the
interaction a personal affront:

"You have to sit down and wait. Drink some water, it makes it easier

for the doctor to see everything he needs to see. We recommend three bags."

"How long do you think I'll be waiting for?"

"It is impossible to say but if you leave, you will lose your place. You are number seventy-eight; number twenty-three just stepped in now. Have a seat and wait, like everyone else."

I scowled and walked out onto the balcony without making eye contact with anyone. Did I say I was different from everyone else? I reflected on her abruptness as I picked my way down the stairs. I snubbed the chemist again; I wanted a bottle of water. The thought of scrunching bags of dubious water down my throat held little appeal. (108)

The nurse's approach to patient care is produced by the site's state of disrepair and deficiency. She therefore embodies the same patriarchal neglect of women as the building does. The nurse abstracts and depersonalises Bolanle to another number in the system, and implies that Bolanle is being impatient and demanding. Bolanle experiences this as injustice, as she did not request preferential treatment. However, it appears that the nurse is correct in her assumption that Bolanle considers the waiting room and the women within to be beneath her. Immediately after their exchange, Bolanle "snub[s] the chemist" and rejects the nurse's suggestion of three bags of water, as she considers the bags the other women are using to be too "dubious" for her consumption. She also refuses to acknowledge them as subjects by avoiding eye contact with them. She then proceeds not to wait in line as instructed but leaves the area in search of bottled water. She does not tolerate the space of the waiting room and its bags of water as the other women do, but distances herself from it and the other women within. She later continues to observe their bodies with mild disgust. The declining state of the building and the lack of resources contributes to the dismissive way the nurse interacts with Bolanle, and Bolanle transfers this neglect and objectification to her interactions with

the other women. Although the root of her disdain is likely based on class difference rather than solely on competition, Bolanle exercises this disdain through the patriarchal discourse of treating women as objects – a discourse constructed by the space. The hospital as private-public space can therefore serve as a vehicle for state power over women, and in a patriarchal state this leads to neglect and oppression. The building itself creates competition among women that can lead them to embody and maintain the patriarchal oppression of women through competing with and objectifying one another.

St Gabriel's Ultrasound as private-public space produces hegemonic femininity as fertile and motherly. However, as the mourners outside the gates indicate, the hospital is a site of deprivation and neglect that is evidence of the patriarchal state's oppression and mistreatment of women. Despite the cultural importance of reproduction, the bodily mechanics of the process is hidden from men's view – the pregnant women spend long days crowded into the busy hospital, separated from the rest of society. Bolanle, as a supposedly infertile woman who has undergone an abortion, attends these medical spaces as heterotopic spaces aimed at separating her from society and correcting her pathology – in this case, her non-conformance to hegemonic femininity. Bolanle's experience of the hospital building and the pregnant bodies within is nightmarish due to her fraught relationship with childbearing as well as the very real competition for resources within the space. This competition is a dual result of the state's neglect of women and the overcrowded state of the space due to the definition of hegemonic femininity as motherly and fertile. By policing one another to conform to a hegemonic femininity that benefits the patriarchal order, women are perpetuating this gender hierarchy. A similar pattern of patriarchal power systems as a cause for competition for resources among women can be observed in spaces where women perform private activities for remuneration. The ways private-public domestic spaces can construct patriarchal femininity will therefore be discussed in the section to follow.

Working in the Home and the Compound

In critical discussions of the separation of the public and private spheres, women's unremunerated domestic work as wives and mothers is a point of contention in studies of middle- and upper-class domestic space. However, characters in these novels do engage in housework, childcare and the crafting of household items for revenue, as they need to contribute to their household income to ensure their own and their children's survival. They therefore conduct what is considered to be private sphere activities for money, and thereby create a public-sphere transaction out of a private-sphere activity. These private-public activities are enabled by private-public places, such as the homes in which these women work, or shops and markets that sell domestic services and goods. An example of this can be seen in Tolani's mother's experience of work in *Swallow*. As a young girl, Arike sits for hours in her aunt's compound, working with the co-op of women who dye cloth together (45). Although this is the site of much of their business operations and therefore a place of work, the compound is a liminal place, as it also comprises homes and their outbuildings. The domestic nature of the work they engage in, as well as the liminal place in which it is conducted, makes this cloth-dying co-op's headquarters a private-public space. The co-op grants Arike's aunt, a childless widow, the opportunity to earn a living. The women who work together in the space leverage their proximity to teach one another – and Arike – about life through gossip disguised as folk wisdom:

> I especially enjoyed their gossip, which they tried to disguise as
> proverbs: "Point one finger at me, you're pointing three at yourself." "That's
> right." "If you keep calling your calabash useless, why won't everyone else?"
> "Of course they will." "Continue digging holes for others and one day you will
> eventually fall in." "True, true." I could almost always guess who they were

talking about. It was not difficult. Not many people lived in Makoku, not

many could escape the women's eyes once they raised their heads from their

work, and they were watching like domestic vigilantes. For instance, if a child

looked unkempt or unfed, they would arrange a family meeting to discuss the

custody of the child, or if a man beat his wife, a silent mob would blindfold

him at night, drag him to the bush and give him the beating of his life. (46)

The women's stories surround the young Arike and become foundational to her

understanding of womanhood. Through extended periods of proximity with other women in

this private-public place, Arike's femininity is nurtured to become what her village deems

acceptable. She learns what brings about good and bad fortune, and approving and

disapproving talk about one's behaviour. She also learns that violence against women is to be

acted against, and that the domestic problems of the community can be tackled through

women's mutual support of one another. In this case, the homosocial private-public space of

paid women's work is ambivalent. While it is empowering in one sense, the conversation and

relationships that the place generates also root in Arike the knowledge that the women in

town will police her femininity to ensure her adherence to the patriarchal norm. This was

demonstrated in the previous chapter, when Arike's sister-in-law ensured that Arike lost

access to her Vespa.

The ambiguous experiences of Tolani's mother in the cloth-dying co-op stands in

stark contrast to another instance of women's work in the novel: the hair salon owned by

Rose's sister, Violet. Violet has a distinctive brand of femininity that she impresses upon

those who visit Simpatico hair salon. She earned her small fortune while she was living in

Italy with a ring of Nigerian prostitutes, where she met Fidele, an Italian doctor (192). After
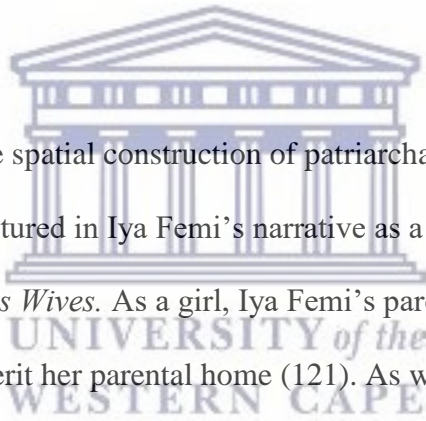
living with Fidele and giving birth to their daughter, she returns home to Lagos and opens her salon. [36] Tolani recounts the way Violet's mother, Sisi, raised her:

> Violet was beautiful. Violet looked exactly like Sisi. Violet was slimmer than Sisi, and Violet was beginning to get attention from men who visited Sisi. Violet liked money, yes, but who didn't? Violet was shy, I was sure. She was barely thirteen when her mother instructed her, "Smile for your uncle, dance for your uncle." She was the woman her mother had forced her to become. Now, she flashed her eyes, shimmied around and threw her head back to laugh as if she believed that whoever you were, whatever you owned, and however much you knew, you wanted to have sex with her. (192)

Violet's patriarchal mother groomed her to become a sex-object that men would find attractive. The combination of Violet's vanity and sexual aggression with the business of beauty in which Simpatico deals creates a place in which Violet's brand of femininity reigns supreme. Her performance is deliberate and meticulously crafted to attract men. Anyone who enters the salon does so to become more beautiful, and acts much as Violet does, with varying degrees of success. The salon's decoration is a manifestation of its owner's personality. The walls are painted red and white, covered in mirrors and black fixtures, and the air smells of "burned hair, pomade, and chemical relaxers" (199). The virginal white and sexually mature red colour scheme aligns well with Violet's sexually aggressive personality, and although the mirrors serve a practical purpose, they also underscore that the place is

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[36] The hair salon is emerging as a new topos in African literature – for example in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Tendai Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*.

designed for the creation and maintenance of beauty. Ugliness is tolerated neither by Violet

nor by her employees. As with Violet, her staff and her customers, the elements of the room

that cannot be seen are less pleasant – the smell of "burned hair, pomade and chemical

relaxer" betray the labour and damage that is required to transform women's appearances.

The unpleasant smell serves as an apt metaphor for the "evil thoughts" that Tolani is

convinced the Simpatico staff have about their clients (199). The holistic effect is that,

instead of the positive sense of community and sisterhood one might expect from a hair salon

– especially one named "Simpatico", which carries associations of being congenial – the

place constructs vapid, cruel femininities that compete with one another to appeal to men.

The result is that women police one another's appearances to conform to patriarchal

expectations of womanhood.

Another example of the spatial construction of patriarchal femininity in private-public

places of women's work is captured in Iya Femi's narrative as a live-in domestic worker in

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives. As a girl, Iya Femi's parents die in a motor accident,

and her uncle and his wife inherit her parental home (121). As will be discussed in the next

chapter, this was a direct result of Iya Femi being a girl and therefore unable to inherit. To rid

themselves of the angry young girl, Iya Femi's aunt and uncle organise a position for her as a

live-in domestic worker for an upper-class family. Although she grew up privileged, Iya Femi

was already primed for housework, as her mother had taught her from a young age to cook

perfect meals, or else suffer a blow from her wooden spoon. Despite her competency, Iya

Femi's new mistress attempts to remove any trace of identity within her new servant:

> As soon as we got to Ibadan, the woman snatched my bag, pressed two
>
> check dresses into my hands and told me I was to call her "Grandma." She
>
> said only her children called her Mummy and I was too lowly to emulate

them. "Here," she said, "the house-girls wear uniforms." She showed me a

tiny space under the stairs and pointed to a mat that was wedged between three

wooden planks. "This is where you will sleep. Let me warn you I don't want

to see any signs that someone slept here when I come downstairs in the

morning. I will burn everything that is out of place. If that means you'll walk

around naked, then so be it." (123)

Iya Femi is not allowed to bring her belongings into the house, and her new employer

assigns herself the name "Grandma" as a form of matriarchal authority. Iya Femi's only

identity is the name of "house-girl", a status indicated by the check dresses that are her

uniform. Her lack of a private room, or even a bed of her own, reinforces this message – she

is not to consider herself a member of the family or household, but is relegated to the status

of furniture. The space that she is assigned to sleep under the stairs is designed to keep her

out of sight, as no-one is to be reminded that she is human. This rule is reinforced by the fact

that she is not allowed to lie down in her sleeping space until all the other members of the

household have retired (124). Iya Femi is in a liminal position in that her place of work is the

private space of others who aim to prevent having to share their private space with her. As

such, Grandma ensures that Iya Femi does not have the privileges associated with being in a

private space, such as physical and psychological safety, privacy and a sense of belonging.

Because she is a live-in worker, the result is that she does not have a private space at all –

Grandma's home is Iya Femi's public sector, as she has to consistently earn her presence

there, and is in constant fear of bodily and psychological harm.

Iya Femi does eventually exercise a strategy to transform the house into a private

space through her sexuality, with limited success. Love and sex are intimate events associated

with the private, and in bringing these into Grandma's domain she makes an attempt to have

a private life within it. The first instance of this occurs when Grandma discovers Iya Femi talking to the gateman, which results in Grandma's violent attempt to erase Iya Femi's ability to take pleasure in privacy:

> Once, when she saw me talking to the gateman, she stripped me naked, rubbed chili between my thighs and locked me out of the house for a whole day. She did not even remember that I was eighteen years old with a chest full of breasts and thighs full of hair. All I could do was weep with shame. (124)

Grandma's first reaction is to de-privatise Iya Femi's body by invading her genital space, after which she locks Iya Femi out of the house to expose her naked body to the world. These actions communicate that there is no room for Iya Femi's private life inside the house – it is only her space of work. Again, the juxtaposition of the safe place that is a family home to Grandma and her children, and the hostile work environment it is for Iya Femi, renders Iya Femi entirely vulnerable to Grandma's whims. In response, Iya Femi "weep[s] with shame" at the exposure of her most private self. Grandma's actions are an attempt to de-gender Iya Femi to avoid her having the private life that comes with womanhood. Only Grandma can harness the power that comes with femininity in the domestic sphere – the status of being the head of the household – even though Iya Femi is the one who performs the associated labour. Grandma's oppression of Iya Femi can be read in two ways. On the one hand, Grandma can simply be seen as a matriarch who chooses to oppress Iya Femi of her own accord, without the influence of patriarchal structures in the space. On the other hand, the framing of women as domestic servants that have only a use-value – as objects in a service transaction – is a patriarchal trope that Grandma is simply maintaining. Considered through this lens, Grandma's actions are produced by the private-public domestic space to oppress Iya Femi using patriarchal discourse.

Thus, the homosocial private-public spaces in which women work can produce and perpetuate patriarchal femininities. In *Swallow,* although the co-op gives Arike agency and power, the space of work generates relationships between women that shape Arike's femininity into a hegemonic, patriarchal conception of who she should be. Similarly, in Simpatico hair salon, the workspace does not generate a sense of community but of surveillance, where women are cruel in their maintenance of hegemonic femininity through appearance. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* Iya Femi is faced with a similar situation in Grandma's home, where she is denied the right to her own sexual development and privacy. Instead, she is expected to cultivate a servile, chaste femininity designed only to serve as a cleaner. She lives in a home where she is denied a private life, and Grandma utilises patriarchal discourse to keep Iya Femi in this position. Although her behaviour can be read as matriarchal or simply in her own best interest, Grandma's oppression of Iya Femi can also be considered the maintenance of a pre-existing patriarchal discourse that constructs women as objects to be appreciated for their use-value. These three spaces therefore all produce patriarchal behaviour in women, whereas only Grandma's oppression of Iya Femi is also executed through space. The mechanism of oppression in *The Tent* is similar to that which Iya Femi experiences in Grandma's house, as Grandmother Hakima as a patriarchal woman also utilises space as a means to control Fatima.

Imagined Space

Where most of the women characters in *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* have access to markets, salons and other private-public spaces, all the central women characters in *The Tent* are restricted to their homes. Their confinement has varying effects on the girls and women, but only the protagonist's development is presented in depth. Fatima is the only focaliser in the novel, and her conflated experience of reality and her imaginary

desert is related without moments of transition between these places. The division between her fixed private space in her home at the periphery of the village, and the semiperipheral community space in her mental geography, is therefore fluid. Her semiperipheral space is not fixed and physical as the semiperipheral spaces in *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* are. It takes careful study of the novel to determine which characters are real, and which exist only in Fatima's imagination. In her state of perpetual confinement, the fantasy desert that Fatima creates is a big, public space that compensates for her lack of access to real versions of such places. Fatima's imaginary place is an oasis located in the vast desert, shaped by the traditional fables related to her by her caretaker, Sardoub. In *The Tent,* the desert is often described as a woman, and signifies a free and unoppressed femininity. It is therefore not surprising that Fatima's mental geography, where she spends much of her time, takes the shape of a desert landscape. Fatima's father, when he visits, stays in his tent in the yard, and Fatima often imagines the journeys he undertakes in the desert with envy. As discussed in the chapter to follow, his tent signifies his freedom to move, and creates a strong contrast to Fatima's fenced domestic space. Through the lens of Fatima's captive state, any kind of femininity that has access to spaces other than the home would comprise a more emancipated life; thus, the nomadic woman she is in her desert space represents freedom to her.

Despite Fatima's apparent use of her imaginary desert as an emancipatory space, in the Bedouin imaginary, the desert signifies vulnerability, placelessness and a potential loss of identity. In his analysis of Saharan space in Libyan writer Ibrahim al-Koni's work, Elliott Colla traces the nomadic life in this context. For Colla, al-Koni's desert can be understood as space in the sense of a "lack or void", whereas settlements feature as concrete, relational places (193). This distinction expresses the dynamics of nomadic life as opposed to settled life: "For sedentarism, then, space is that which must be traversed so as to move from place

to place; for nomadism, the mutable and cyclical inhabitation of space invariably creates strong senses of place, though they are only fleeting" (193-194). In al-Koni's work, the distinction between these ways of life is also bound to the Sufi separation of body and spirit; whereas sedentarism is associated with the body, nomadism is the sphere of spirit (194). This desert also serves as the liminal space between the Arab-Berber North and the African South, where it exists "between Islam and animism, between nomadism and sedentarism, between material and spiritual life" (Colla 195). Al-Koni's representation of the desert is similar to that of Fatima's imaginary desert world in *The Tent.* Mystical characters from folklore occupy the desert she constructs in her imagination, and she visits this space to escape the physical parameters of her prison-like domestic place. As with al-Koni's desert, Fatima's imaginary space is liminal – it is not concrete, but it is her only experience of the world outside of her home, and therefore a very real space to her. However, despite the freedom of movement that this desert space grants her, her desert remains a dangerous place consistent with Colla's articulation of the desert in the Arab imaginary. Fatima's exposure to the open, dangerous and insecure place that is the desert of her mind leads to her neglecting her physical health. In this sense, Fatima can be described as punishing her body for anchoring her in physical space.

The vulnerability of her position in her mental desert does not discourage Fatima from using it as a means to escape her state of confinement. Her repeated occupation of her desert world angers her patriarchal, controlling grandmother immensely. Fatima is therefore also using the desert as a space of transgression, as she utilises it to attain a freedom denied to her by her cultural context. Bertrand Westphal discusses the desert as a site of spatial resistance in his work *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces.* For Westphal, the "transgressivity" inherent to the transpositioning and traversal of space and borders resists categorisation, containment and authority (39). To study nomadic space through this lens, Westphal uses as a

foundation the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to distinguish between striated and smooth space (Westphal 39). Striated space is characterised by structures of enclosure and the roads that connect them, and is "occupied by state apparatus", whereas smooth space is "virtually open to infinity" (39). Although these terms are not sufficiently relevant to this study to unpack fully here, it is important to note that perpetual mobility that refuses to be confined within the state apparatus resists authoritarian structures. In *Africa's Narrative Geographies: Charting the Intersections of Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies*, Dustin Crowley applies Westphal's paradigm to the reading of postcolonial space by constructing striated space as the "realm of colonialism and imperialism", thereby evoking the centre/periphery power structure discussed in the previous chapter (7). In this paradigm, smooth space then functions as the "space of resistance" against hierarchy, where mobility is "enacted both through and *as* smooth space, crossing borders and mobilizing the periphery against the centre" (9).[37] Crowley summarises the convergence of Westphal's geocritical approach with the study of postcolonial literature:
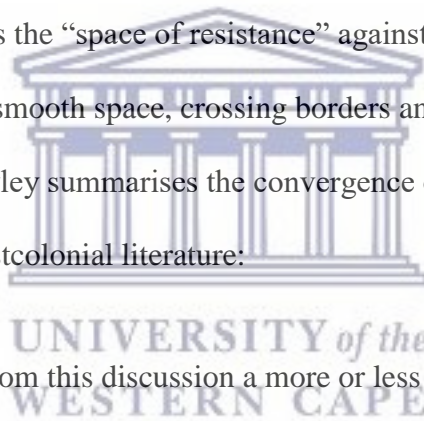
> We can distil from this discussion a more or less common approach to
> literature that spatial literary studies have inherited from postcolonialism.
> Stemming from a shared grounding in deconstructive post-structuralism,
> geocritics like Westphal have presumed that "stable" geographic phenomena

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[37] This is echoed by Tally in *Spatiality* where he states that "Deleuze's nomads provide an apposite figure for a kind of resistance that is not exterior to relations of power, but exerts a force within their elaborate, mobile, and ever shifting web of spatial relations" (Tally 139).

like borders (and attendant notions of concrete or bounded place) are

inherently the products of power, created in attempts to control and subjugate;

the natural product of resistance, then, would be the dissolution or

deconstruction of borders and a more indeterminate, hybrid flow. (8)

The deconstruction of borders as structures of subjugation is key to the transgressive

nature of the desert space that Fatima creates in her mind. The location of her life-world is

limited almost entirely to her mother's home, while her father and grandmother, the two

patriarchal figures in the novel, traverse community spaces and landscapes at will. As Colla

notes with reference to the work of al-Koni, "[s]edentarism is associated with language,

understood to be meaningless chatter, while nomadism is characterized by a silence,

understood to be significant and eloquent. Whereas the former is conceptualized as feminine,

the latter appears as masculine" (194). Fatima's transgression into the realm of male power

through her mental mobility is therefore further enforced by her simultaneous refusal to

speak: she becomes mute toward the end of the novel. Her continued visits to this smooth

space, and her unwillingness to live in the confined space of her reality, result in her eventual

descent into madness. As will be discussed in the chapter to follow, this madness itself is also

a form of revolt.

Fatima's access to the desert grants her the mobility she lacks in her physical world,

especially when she breaks both her legs and they fail to heal completely. She abandons her

crutches and decides to crawl instead. Her physical reality therefore becomes all the more

restrictive, as the loss of her legs hinders her mobility, thereby shrinking her world even

further. Her mental geography is the only place in which she retains the ability to move – and

the agency that comes with this. Similar to the treatment of mobility in *Swallow* and *The

Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* discussed in the previous chapter, in *The Tent* mobility is a

struggle for Fatima to access and maintain as a woman. As Crowley observes, mobility is not inherently emancipatory; it must have a "clear autonomy and liberatory effect" rather than a sense of dislocation and disruption (136). Fatima's desert space, despite being a locus of transgression and free movement, is also fraught with nightmarish allegories of her captivity, such as an image of a female raptor tied to a post, her eyes sewn shut. Eventually, Fatima's depression and madness render her entirely immobile. Toward the end of the novel, she fails to visit her mental space. When she does regain access to the desert, she sees her imaginary community fall apart as her friends depart and die. This, too, is consistent with Colla's characterisation of nomadism and mobility as associated with "*Thanatos* and the soul's transcendence of the body by the way of its confrontation with death" (194). This constitutes the desert as a kind of purgatory; a "realm the spirit passes through as it transcends bodily form" (Colla 195). This is certainly the case for Fatima, whose mental and physical health declines rapidly as she spends increasingly prolonged periods of time in her imaginary world. She neglects her body as the vessel that ties her to physical space, but she does not die – she continues to exist in a state of half-consciousness.

It is because of this damage to Fatima's health as well as her transgression into the male realm of mobility that the women in Fatima's life discourage her visits to her desert space. Sardoub tries to bring Fatima back to the physical world, despite having helped Fatima to create her mental space by telling her the folk tales that shaped it. Fatima's sister Safiya's intentions for keeping Fatima away from her mental space are similar to those of Sardoub – she fears for Fatima's wellbeing. Anne, a British neighbour, views Fatima's stories from her imaginary space as creative fodder for her writing, and entertainment for her guests. As such, Anne does not prevent Fatima from accessing her mental space, but instead uses Fatima as an object for entertainment (70-72). Fatima is aware of the objectifying and disempowering nature of this relationship, to the extent that she begins to foster a hatred for Anne.

Grandmother Hakima, on the other hand, tries to remove Fatima's agency in a different manner. When Fatima enters her imaginary space, her grandmother describes Fatima's behaviour in physical reality as animal-like, and tries to prevent Fatima visiting her imaginary desert by shaming her. As discussed, Fatima is using her desert as spatial resistance to escape her captive state in the physical world under Grandmother Hakima's rule. As this poses a threat to the patriarchal authority that confines Fatima, Grandmother Hakima is infuriated by the behaviour and attempts to confine Fatima to the physical world. Grandmother Hakima thus uses patriarchal discourse to control and oppress Fatima to restrict her movement and freedom as much as possible – even within Fatima's mind.

Conclusion

The liminal places that construct the semiperiphery, or the private-public, do not offer a space of resistance and sisterhood, but are permeated by their patriarchal contexts. These places can produce oppressive femininities and can be used by patriarchal women to oppress other women. This finding contradicts studies of liminal women's spaces that are emancipatory, such as Francoise Lionnet's study of women's solidarity in prison contexts in "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra." In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the ultrasound clinic reveals how the patriarchal government's control over (and neglect of) women's medical resources creates competition among women. This can lead to their policing one another's femininities and preventing one another from accessing care. Places of women's work, such as the women's cooperative, the hair salon, and domestic space, can similarly produce women who regulate and objectify other women's bodies and femininities to ensure that they conform to the patriarchal womanhood from which these enterprises profit. Lastly, an imaginary space of freedom as constructed by Fatima in *The Tent* can afford captive and

restricted women a degree of mobility, but can also lead to their self-destruction. Women like Anne and Grandmother Hakima use this imaginary space to objectify Fatima for entertainment purposes or limit her access to it in order to restrict her movement in accordance with patriarchal norms. In these ways, private-public, semiperipheral and community places can facilitate the oppression of women by other women, often according to the norms of the patriarchal systems within which these places are located. As with private-public spaces, domestic places can also construct oppressive femininities. These places, however, are not only structured according to national patriarchal authority, but also according to domestic patriarchy, which acts as a mirror of national patriarchy, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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# Chapter 4: Body and Brick: Patriarchs by Proxy in Domestic Places

Introduction

Representations of domestic spaces consistently serve as engaging sites for studies of the spatial exercise of power. The home, which comprises walls, rooms, hallways, furniture and the bodies that interact with them, is a palimpsest of power made structural. In Anglo-American scholarship, the domestic is a private space associated with the feminine, and is considered a sanctuary as well as a place of entrapment and oppression. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the gendered public/private dichotomy cannot be universally applied. In African literary texts the domestic often contains both private and public places. The domestic will therefore not be examined here as a private space, but through the material realities of the home. The homes in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2010), Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* (1998), Sefi Atta's *Swallow* (2011) and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) reveal how domestic places are used by patriarchal women to oppress other women. In particular, the body as a place in relation to the home forms a central part of this discussion. On the one hand, the body is an open place that is not hermetically sealed but intimately connected with the home. This porous body will be theorised with reference to the works of Charles Taylor, Julia Kristeva and James Krasner. On the other hand, the body as the most intimate home of the self also functions as a microcosm of domestic space. These conceptualisations of the body allow for the study of its use as a mechanism of patriarchal control in *Lyrics Alley, The Tent, Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* The ways small spaces produce patriarchal women are examined, along with how patriarchal women use domestic space to oppress other women through patriarchy. This offers a view of how women's domestic spaces are not necessarily positive, affirming or liberatory as is often argued, but can also construct patriarchal femininities that
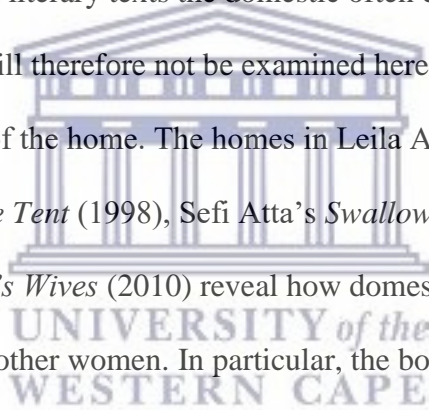
further use place – including the body as an extension or microcosm of domestic place – to oppress other women.

In the next section, I review the literature on gender and the representation of African domestic space to define a relevant understanding of the domestic. I use the work of Virginia Woolf as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as points of departure to examine the representation of gendered domestic space in literature. This is followed by a discussion of the interconnections between the body and domestic space. In "The Body Written at Risk", I discuss the ways the women characters' bodies – their situatedness in space – expose them to power dynamics within domestic places. Iya Segi's creation of an inhospitable home environment in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is examined through the damage to Bolanle and Segi's bodies. Rose's death in *Swallow* and the risk to which Tolani is exposed are discussed as being a result of Rose's participation in a patriarchal operation. Lastly, the female genital excisions that take place in *Lyrics Alley* and *The Tent* are examined as the outcome of patriarchal dynamics enforced by women. In the second section, "Maintaining Boundaries in Unhomely Literary Homes", I examine the patriarchal mechanisms that women use to control one another within domestic space. This control can manifest as the creation of an unwelcome, expulsive or entrapping home environment. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* Iya Segi uses patriarchal norms to render the home unwelcoming for Bolanle. Iya Segi expels Bolanle's friends and ensures that she does not enjoy the same domestic comforts as her co-wives. She also uses Bolanle's ownership of a private space – her bedroom – against the youngest wife. By hiding magical objects in Bolanle's bedroom, Iya Segi is able falsely to accuse Bolanle of being a witch who is attempting to harm Baba Segi. The spatial production of patriarchal women is manifest in Shoneyin's portrayal of Iya Segi's and Iya Femi's respective childhood homes. Whereas Iya Femi is exiled from her parents' home due to her inability to inherit it as a girl, Iya Segi's experience of living in a
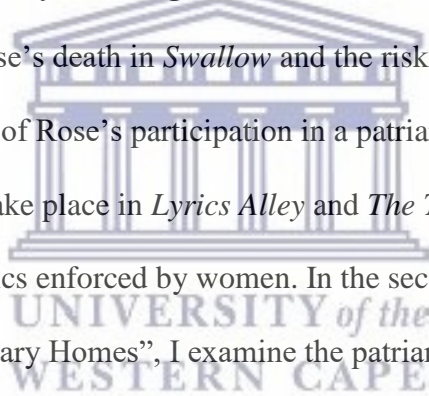
large body in a small house, and sharing this limited space with her equally large mother, creates in her an anxious claustrophobia that drives her need to own her own home. In *Swallow,* although Tolani and Rose do control their own apartment, Rose's dependence on a man allows patriarchal power to transform their home into an oppressive space to both women. In the final section of this chapter, I examine how domestic space in *The Tent* is a site of captivity for all the women characters save Grandmother Hakima, who leverages patriarchy to act as the gatekeeper to the compound. This is suggested by Fatima's experience of the home as a prison and her feverish attempts to escape, as well as her eventual exile to the "lemon" room, as it is called, the place reserved for transgressive femininity.

In *Lyrics Alley*, the Abuzeid co-wives Nabilah and Waheeba lay individual claim to their different sides of the *saraya* (palace) through personalised domestic management. Whereas Nabilah opts for Egyptian staff, a private bedroom and dinners around a table, Waheeba prefers a Sudanese *hoash* with beds – arranged in a rectangle – on which to eat. As a rule, the women do not enter one another's wings, but Nabilah does visit Waheeba in the *hoash* once, with catastrophic results. Nabilah inadvertently insults Waheeba, who releases a tirade of belittlement in return. Waheeba's female friends and relations are in attendance, which escalates the argument between the women. Nabilah strides from the *hoash* in anger, but her fashionable high heels – likely purchased in Cairo – nearly cause her to stumble on the uneven floor. Waheeba then takes advantage of her proximity to Nabilah's home to exact revenge. Waheeba lures Nabilah's daughter Ferial to her wing of the home, and has Ferial's genital excision performed against Nabilah's will. The mutilation of the young girl's body is the catalyst that finally drives Nabilah from the home, and from Sudan.

In *The Tent,* Fatima grows up watching her mother's mental health decline, partly as a result of multiple miscarriages. Fatima hears rumours of her father strangling her mother at

night, and her Grandmother Hakima – the patriarch by proxy – encourages him to separate

from the demented wife who has failed to bear him a son. Fatima's mother is eventually

exiled to the lemon room, situated beside the main house, where she has her final miscarriage

and dies shortly after. As a noble Bedouin girl, Fatima is not allowed to leave the domestic

property and enter the peasant village. Grandmother Hakima arranges marriages for three of

Fatima's sisters, and as they move into their new homes, Fatima remains on the property with

the servants and her dying mother. Fatima's confinement to the property and feverish

attempts to escape result in irreparable damage to her mind and body. She spends increasing

amounts of time in her imaginary desert world, and falls from trees as she tries to see further

over the fence. Grandmother Hakima declares Fatima a transgressive young woman and

continues to enforce the impenetrable boundaries of the home. After her father's first

remarriage, Fatima is exiled to the lemon room, as her mother was.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Ishola Alao's four co-wives grow up in

very different homes. Iya Segi, the most senior wife, hails from a house – owned by her

mother – which was too small for the two large women to share. She spent much of her time

in her bedroom, collecting and counting the money she earned through her enterprising

nature. When her mother intrudes into Iya Segi's bedroom and finds her nude on the bed,

covered in money, Iya Segi's association of money with pleasure becomes too explicit for her

mother to tolerate. Her mother arranges the marriage between the son of a family friend and

Iya Segi. As a result, Iya Segi's dreams of building her own house and sharing it with a

woman she loved were replaced with the reality of funding and running Baba Segi's home.

The second wife, Iya Tope, comes from a simple, poor home. The home itself is of secondary

importance in terms of her childhood experience of domestic space, as most of her family

members treated the agricultural fields as their primary space. Her move from her father's

home to Baba Segi's was therefore a move to an opulent city home in comparison to her
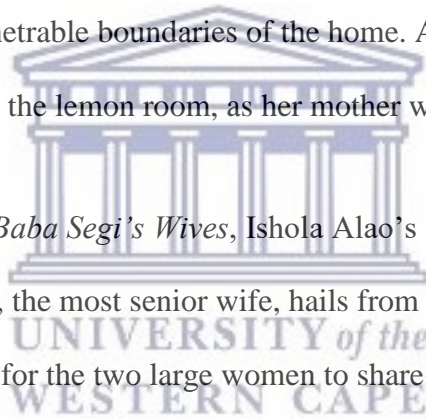
spaces of origin. Iya Femi, who entered Baba Segi's home next, arrived there from her

position as a domestic worker in another woman's home, where she lived during her teenage

years. When her parents die in a motor vehicle accident, Iya Femi's gender prohibits her from

inheriting their wealth. Instead, the home becomes the property of her uncle and his wife.

They arrange for Iya Femi to become a live-in domestic worker for a cruel woman in a

nearby town. Her new "home" is the place where Iya Femi encounters Baba Segi and bribes

his driver to convince him to marry her. Bolanle, the junior wife and protagonist, is raised by

a neurotic mother who is desperate to create the illusion that they are a financially stable,

sophisticated, modern middle-class family. Her mother's unreasonable expectations of her

daughters create deep-seated fears and anxieties in Bolanle and her sister. After she is

sexually assaulted and undergoes an abortion, Bolanle's university years are anxious and

socially isolated. Eventually, she enters Baba Segi's household in an attempt to escape her

own life and reassess her situation in a space she does not have to share with her mother. The

contrasting spatial origins of the four co-wives shape their respective experiences of Baba

Segi's house. Most importantly, Iya Femi and Iya Segi use the house to isolate and limit

Bolanle in various ways. This results in the accidental death of Iya Segi's daughter, Segi, the

eldest child.

In *Swallow*, Tolani and Rose share an apartment on the outskirts of Lagos, from

which they commute together to the bank where they both work. When Rose is dismissed

from her position, she spends her days lounging around their apartment, which becomes

saturated with her laziness. Tolani's annoyance with the situation is exacerbated when Rose

enters into a relationship with the smuggler, OC, who begins to sponsor Rose's rent and

purchases luxury goods for her. Rose commands a permanent space on the couch, where she

drinks beer and watches television, and occasionally steals food from Tolani. When Rose

begins to consider their flat to be beneath her socio-economic status, Tolani is relieved that

Rose then spends most of her time at OC's flat, despite Tolani's fear of living alone in a dangerous neighbourhood. When Tolani is suspended from work, Rose takes advantage of their relationship to convince Tolani to help her smuggle cocaine for OC. Tolani eventually agrees but is unable to swallow the condom full of narcotics. She comes to the realisation that she does not want to smuggle – personal dignity and identity carry greater importance to her. Rose undertakes the journey alone, and dies at the airport when the condom full of cocaine ruptures in her intestines. To recover from the trauma of her friend's death – and the spectre of her own possible death had she made different decisions – Tolani returns to the town of her childhood and the care of her mother, Arike. Throughout the text, Arike's story is interspersed with Tolani's. Arike was a successful cloth-dyer in her youth and, as is common in Yoruba households, is the primary breadwinner of her home. She even manages to obtain a small motorbike to further her economic gain and efficiency, but her jealous sister-in-law ensures that Arike is ordered by the family patriarch to cease her use of the vehicle, as it is insulting to her husband's authority.
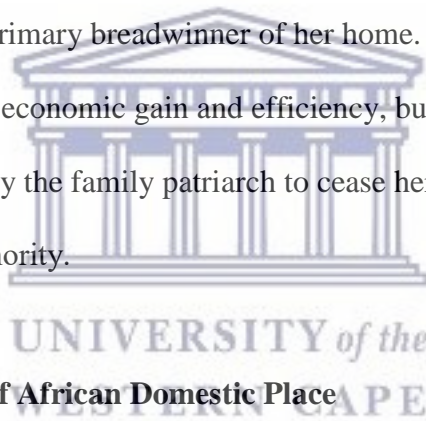
Gender in Representations of African Domestic Place

In the previous chapters, representations of African national, urban, rural and private-public spaces and places suggest that these spaces facilitate the maintenance of patriarchal power by women. Within the Anglo-American literary canon, the penetration of such patriarchal structures within domestic space is a popular point of inquiry. As discussed in the introductory chapter, pioneering texts in this regard are Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own", which comments on the importance of privacy and ownership over space for facilitating creativity and cultural production, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* which unpacks carceral spatial power dynamics in Victorian literary domestic space. In the introduction to their edited volume *Writing Women and Space:*

Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose disrupt the tradition

of studying the Anglo-American home – in its entirety – as the domain of female authority. In

this scholarly context, domestic space is usually studied as a private-sphere space, and

theorised as such. The discourse that surrounds examinations of public and private space also

relies on the Anglo-American gendering of public and private space.[38] As discussed in the

previous chapter, while the validity of gendering private space as feminine and public space

as masculine in Anglo-American contexts should not be discounted, Blunt and Rose argue

that the division between the private as the "domestic haven of feminine grace" and the

public as the "arena of aggressive masculine competition" is an ideal pursued by the Anglo-

American middle class in order to distinguish them as white (3), as explained fully in chapter

three. This domestic haven is internally divided into spaces of oppression and is potentially

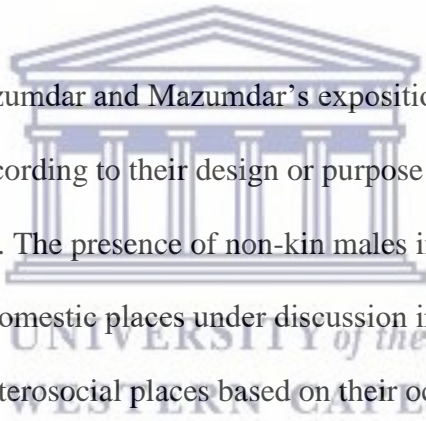carceral in its limiting definition of the women's world.

The view of private and public spaces as dichotomous is based on the pervasive

mimetic study of space in which it is assumed that space is knowable and transparent (4).

Transparent space assumes the perspective of Donna Haraway's "master subject" (586-587)

– as with the erasure of race and gender, the supposed objective view of space usually

produces the perspective of the "white, middle-class, masculine, and heterosexual" subject

(Blunt and Rose 4). To study the spaces in which women move, one must therefore assume a

particular epistemological and political framework in an attempt to avoid studying their

spaces through the perspective of this master subject. This is even more important in a study

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[38] One example of this is M. Z. Rosaldo's 1974 essay "Is Female to Male as Nature Is

to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture and Society*.

located entirely outside of the geographical and socio-political contexts from which the public/private distinction and its implied master subject emerged. To avoid the erasure of these class and race specificities, the distinction between public and private space cannot be universalised. In her 1984 paper "Notes Toward a Politics of Location", Adrienne Rich's counter to the illusion of transparency is to interpret a narrative in terms of its "politics of location" and thereby foreground the specificity of a character's experiential reality (210). In this approach, extensive focus is placed on the subject's position, including the contributions of historical, geographical and political contexts to shaping this position. For Blunt and Rose, this mitigates the risk of the erasure of difference through the master-subject perspective. This was also suggested by the analysis of private-public places in the previous chapter, an example of which is the home of the employer to the domestic worker. To contextualise the discussion of such domestic specificities here, I shall outline African domestic space as shaped by Arab-Islamic cultures first, after which I shall trace domestic space in selected African contexts as shaped by African traditional cultures and religions. In particular, I shall examine the ways these domestic contexts are potentially polygamous but present with different spatial divisions.

A relevant example of the context-specific division of the private and public is the definition of the private sphere in Arab-Islamic places. In "Rethinking Public and Private Space: Religion and Women in Muslim Society", Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar unpack the contextual division of the public and private in Islamic cultures. Mazumdar and Mazumdar argue that, while the home remains equated with the "private world of women", and "the neighbourhood with the public domain of men", private and public spaces are more accurately defined by their occupants (303). The authors explain the importance of kinship in defining places:

What constitutes public and private is predicated largely on the Islamic notion of *mahram* and *na-mahram*. *Mahram* refers to a specific category of people of the other sex with whom marriage is explicitly forbidden (e.g. for a woman: father, brother, and for a man: mother, sister, etc.). This is a very small number of people. *Na-mahram* are those "of the opposite sex whose kinship does not represent any impediment for marriage" (Khatib-Chahidi, 1981; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 1997a, 1997b). This category includes the rest of the members of the opposite sex. It is with *na-mahram*, who can be kin or non-kin, that interaction and contact between males and females is restricted by Islam. (304)

The implication of Mazumdar and Mazumdar's exposition is that places are not inherently public or private according to their design or purpose but defined by their occupants at a moment in time. The presence of non-kin males in any enclosed area would make that area "public". The domestic places under discussion in this chapter therefore divide further into homosocial and heterosocial places based on their occupants. Jane Khatib-Chahidi explains in "Sexual Prohibitions, Shared Space and Fictive Marriages in Shi'ite Iran" that this system represents "a comprehensive attempt to avoid all extramarital sexuality which, in Islam, is strictly prohibited" (112). A similar pattern of the gendered division of domestic space can be observed in Bedouin communities. In *The Bedouin*, Shelagh Weir notes that the tent that serves as the domestic space for nomadic[39] Bedouin communities is

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[39] This apparent tautology is deliberate, as the Bedouin family in *The Tent* is culturally Bedouin despite the fact that the women are settled in a peasant village.

divided into dedicated spaces for homosocial groups. This is achieved "by means of a curtain (*sāhah*) which is suspended between the front and back of the tent", creating one area for men to entertain guests, and another area for women to prepare food and raise the children (19). In these contexts, place is used to control sexuality through context-specific definitions of the private and public. In the Arab-Islamic household, women are therefore often secluded from the outside world as well as from certain parts of the home. In *Lyrics Alley*, the division of space according to gender is further compounded by a second spatial division – nationality. Waheeba's Sudanese rooms and Nabilah's Egyptian wing comprise two microcosmic national spaces.

As is the case with Arab-Islamic and Islamic private space, African domestic spaces influenced by indigenous cultures also require a separate paradigm for study. In much of the scholarship concerning canonical African literatures, small spaces are studied as allegories for national space. As shown in the first chapter, governmental authority is patriarchal, which allows for the penetration of patriarchy within smaller spaces situated within national space. African works in which domestic space and the family serve as an allegory of the nation[40] include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not*

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[40] In the first chapter, this aesthetic is discussed with regard to Frederic Jameson's assertion that all third-world texts are national allegories, to which Aijaz Ahmad counters that Jameson's categorisation of texts as third-world is an act of Eurocentric othering, and that his assertion regarding national allegory being the only aesthetic available to such texts is reductive and homogenising. For a more nuanced discussion of this dialogue, see the first chapter.

Yet Born, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between,* as well as later texts such as

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus.* In the first chapter, this allegorical approach

was demonstrated in the study of *Lyrics Alley,* where co-wives Nabilah and Waheeba occupy

opposite ends of a palatial home, thereby signifying the disparate nations of Egypt and Sudan

that share a government. Another example of the study of patriarchal structures within

African literary domestic space is Grace Musila's "Familial Cartographies in Contemporary

East African Short Stories". Musila's reading of Binyavanga Wainaina's "Discovering

Home" and Muthoni Garland's "Tracking the Scent of My Mother" examines new metaphors

for nationhood in ambivalent family places that hold potential for both healing and

destruction. Musila notes that nationalism and African writing have a "chequered relationship

with gender and family" (350). Her point of departure is Elleke Boehmer's observation in

Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation that "the new

postcolonial nation is a historically male constructed space" in which women are "cast as

symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition" (Boehmer 22). The doubling of this patriarchal

paradigm within domestic space is signified in various ways. Musila notes that John

Kariuki's "Silent but Compelling Power of Wall Literature" and Achille Mbembe's *On the

Postcolony* both reveal how portraits and murals of powerful male leaders (Christ and the

president, respectively) can reconstruct masculine state power within the home (Musila

350).[41] Power is therefore multiscalar in nature, which suggests that the geo-political context

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[41] Mildred Mortimer echoes this in "Whose House Is This? Space and Place in

Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* and *La petite fille du réverbère*". Mortimer

argues that masculine supremacy is a reality in African domestic space, where women are

of a home partially determines how power is constructed within it. Christopher Okonkwo conducts a study with a similar thematic focus to Musila's, but his text is set in a different geographic location. In "Space Matters: Form and Narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*", Okonkwo examines other ways in which the materiality of the home can represent and reinforce such patriarchal rule. The most significant patriarch in the novel is the heroine's uncle, called Babamukuru. Okonkwo unpacks the way Babamukuru's home codifies his power, and the subsequent oppression of his wife, Maiguru. An example of this spatially constructed oppression is found in the broken window in the kitchen, which the protagonist Tambu mentions as a particular annoyance to Maiguru, who is constantly exposed to the draught as she prepares meals (Dangarembga 67). That the broken window is not prioritised for repair despite the fact that Maiguru spends hours in its draught signifies her lesser status in the home. The doubling of national patriarchal systems of power in African domestic spaces is a familiar trope in African literature. This is a similarity between African and European domestic space. Consequently, the spaces in these texts will not be approached from within the paradigm of the gendered boundary between private and public space, but rather through a focus on the materiality of the domestic and its relation to the body-as-space.

In domestic spaces shaped by African indigenous cultures and religions, gender is not necessarily a guiding principle for spatial division, as is common in many Islamic households such as those in *The Tent* and *Lyrics Alley*. These domestic spatial divisions are not only

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valued as "instruments of reproduction" but not for their significant contribution to economic production (468).

dependent on socio-spatial context, but also have a temporal element in that they evolve and change with time. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God,* the wives in the respective central polygamous marriages all have their own huts and households, much like the wives in the Islamic-influenced household in *Lyrics Alley.* However, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the co-wives share a single household with shared living areas but separate bedrooms. Domestic spatial divisions in polygamous households are therefore heavily influenced by socio-historical context but not necessarily determined by it, and there is much variation. Whether in polygamous arrangements or not, wives are also granted different levels of free movement; women's movements are generally constricted in the Islamic-influenced spaces of *The Tent* and *Lyrics Alley*, whereas in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *Swallow*, women move more freely, in part because Yoruba women in particular are expected to contribute to the household's income. These varied domestic spatial arrangements also contribute to shaping different kinds of relationships among co-wives. In "Polygamy in African Fiction", Vuyiswa Ndabayakhe and Catherine Addison counter assertions by scholars such as Obioma Nnaemeka and Julia Nfah-Abbenyi that polygamy is not inherently oppressive but can be beneficial to women when entered into freely and in a culturally conducive context. As part of this study, they seek to debunk the assertion that co-wives can develop a sisterhood with the potential for liberation and support.[42] In their survey of co-wives' relationships in polygamous marriages in African fiction, the authors contend that a sisterhood structure only develops in the work of male authors such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Onuora Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards.* Positive

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[42] See Nnaemeka's 1997 paper "Urban Spaces, Women's Places: Polygamy as sign in Mariama Bâ's Novels."

relationships between co-wives are conspicuously absent or even actively undermined in

multiple other works of African fiction, including Es'kia Mphahlele's *Chirundu,* Ousmane

Sembène's *Xala,* Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate (Scarlet Song),* Ama Ata Aidoo's

Changes: A Love Story, and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood.* Such nefarious

relationships between women – whether in a polygamous context or not – form the basis of

the discussion of domestic space in this chapter. In my study of these texts, however, I focus

specifically on how patriarchal women use domestic space to oppress other women within the

home.

Situating the Body

In the first chapter, women's bodies were explored as national spaces – sites where

national authority is exercised. The construction of women's bodies as tools for reproduction

in spaces like the hospital was one of the focal discussions in the third chapter. Within the

small spaces discussed in this chapter, the body also functions as a small place of its own –

namely, the body as the primal and most intimate home. In the body-as-home, the body

functions as a space that hosts, rejects, and sustains damage just as other spaces do. However,

the body is also represented as having "walls" that are penetrable. The body's orifices and

porous skin are open to the world and allow the world to penetrate the body. Spaces and

places can extend through this porous boundary into the body itself. In this manner, the body

can also function as an extension of domestic space, inextricably interconnected with it,

rather than a place or home of its own. These two metaphors for the body, namely the body-

as-home and the porous body, are the paradigms through which the body will be theorised in

these discussions of small space.

The interconnectedness of the body with space, as well as its potential to function as a home or place itself, both render it vulnerable to being used for the spatial exercise of power. For example, in the previous chapter, examining the hospital as private-public space illuminated the ways in which state control over medical resources can facilitate a form of biopower that controls the population in a discourse of life and death. The exercise of biopower can be considered a kind of "body politics", which encompasses various processes of power negotiated via the body. In the editors' introduction to a special issue of *Feminist Africa* titled "Body Politics and Citizenship", Sophie Oldfield, Elaine Salo and Ann Schlyter unpack the different forms that these power negotiations can take:

> We conceptualise "body politics" as the negotiation of power via the body, processes that operate sometimes directly (for instance, violently), but also processes that work at a symbolic and representational scale. At the same time, we analyse body politics in its materiality, played out in homes and neighbourhoods, in the types of tenure families negotiate, in the depravity of material conditions on the margins and peri-urban edges of our cities. Body politics are also constituted relationally: within households and families, community processes and in neighbourhood and civic politics, through access or a lack thereof to state resources, or through interventions by the state. (Oldfield, Salo and Schlyter 2)

In particular, it is the physicality of the body – its situatedness in space – that makes it vulnerable to the power dynamics exercised through space. Oldfield, Salo and Schlyter mention two lenses through which to consider the locale of the body: the "material conditions" of spaces that act upon the body, and the way a person's body stands in relation to other bodies and powers within spaces. These approaches will be employed to discuss how

patriarchal women characters oppress other women through the body, particularly as situated within domestic space.

The body as a porous space that is not hermetically sealed – and therefore interconnected with the world – can function as an extension of domestic place. To examine the interplay of female characters' bodies with the homes that construct their narratives, I shall make use of James Krasner's approach as outlined in *Home Bodies: Tactile Experience in Domestic Space*. Krasner draws on the work of a variety of philosophers and cultural theorists including Gaston Bachelard, Michel de Certeau, Michael McKeon and Victoria Rosner, to create an approach that considers the home both as a physical and mental space. Krasner's key focus is the "emotional impact of the material aspects of the home in relation to the materiality of the body" (6-7). The key elements of Krasner's approach borrow from Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, in which the structures within the home are considered synecdoches of the subject's thoughts and emotions. Similarly, McKeon and Rosner's work focusses on the particular social symbolisms created in the relations between material objects within a home. Krasner's approach thus takes two mutually constitutive processes into account: the virtual or imaginary home as constructed by the subject, as well as the material home as it constructs the subject. An example of this approach can be observed in Debby Bonnin and Quraisha Dawood's study of how domestic workers in some Islamic homes have to modify their bodies according to Islamic custom, as their employer's domestic space determines what is appropriate in terms of dress, hygiene and the consumption of food (66). Bonnin and Dawood argue that there is a mutual impact between the body and the home: "the body of the domestic worker is subversive to the madam's construction of the private space of the home", whereas "the construction of space in the home as private intrudes upon the domestic worker's personal space and body in the workplace" (66). This example demonstrates how power relations entrenched within domestic space are intimately connected
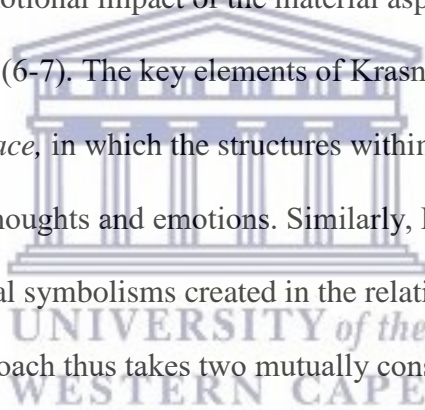
with the bodies that interact with it. Patriarchal power dynamics can therefore also be enacted on and read through the control of women characters' bodies in domestic space.

The body's interconnection with the external world has both positive and negative implications, and can also imply a connection with the spiritual world. For the characters under discussion, the porous body is a mechanism by which patriarchal space can penetrate their most intimate small space. However, the intimate relationship between the body and space can also be positive, depending on the nature of its connection to the environment and the spirit worlds. In *A Secular Age,* Charles Taylor argues that there are two different conceptions of the self that prevailed before, and then after the philosophical individualism of modernity. Before humankind turned to science and secularism, the body was understood as porous – open to interventions of various kinds from "some outside power" such as the spirit world (35). After the secular turn, the modern self becomes understood as buffered and separate from outside influence. For Taylor, "this self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it" (38). By contrast, the open body is vulnerable, despite the fact that the outside influence can either be positive – as when it is aided by ancestral spirits – or negative, as in the case of demonic possession. The discussions of the porous body in this chapter centre on porousness as vulnerability to patriarchal control, but this is not a necessity – it is a result of my focus rather than broader conceptualisations of the body.

As mentioned earlier, the second pervasive bodily motif in the texts at hand is the representation of the body as a micro-home. This smaller home that is the woman's body is also vulnerable to those powers constructed and exercised within domestic space. An illustrative example of the body-as-home is the allegorical language with which Bedouin people refer to their homes. Shelagh Weir explains that the Bedouin tent is constructed from the "hair and wool of animals" and effectively performs what are arguably the two most
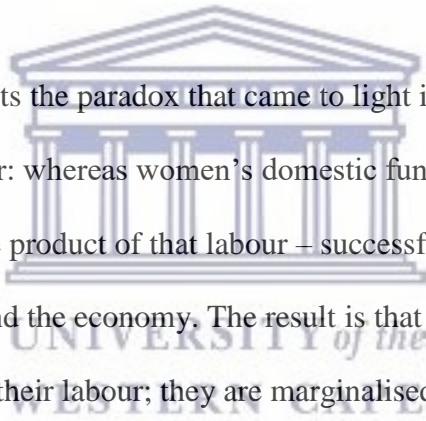
important functions of domestic space – "shelter and privacy" (19). The Arabic name

cements this purpose: *bayt* is short for *bayt al-sha'r*, which translates to "house" or "home"

(13). Although the tent is constructed from the bodies of animals, it is also closely connected

to the human body. Weir explains that "body imagery" is applied to various parts of the tent:

"The front corner poles are called 'hands' (*yid*), and the back corner poles 'legs' (*rijil*). The

front of the tent is the 'face' (*wujh al-bayt*), and the back 'the back of the head' (*gafā al-

bayt*)" (15). This representation of the home as the body and the body as the home is also

suggested in *The Tent*. Fatima's experience of her home as a prison causes her physical and

mental health to deteriorate. When her legs are broken repeatedly and fail to heal, she

becomes dependent on crutches and, finally, resorts to crawling. In this way her body too

becomes a smaller prison that mirrors her external domestic space, to the point where she can

no longer speak. Her body as a home space therefore manifests the same patriarchal control

as her external home.
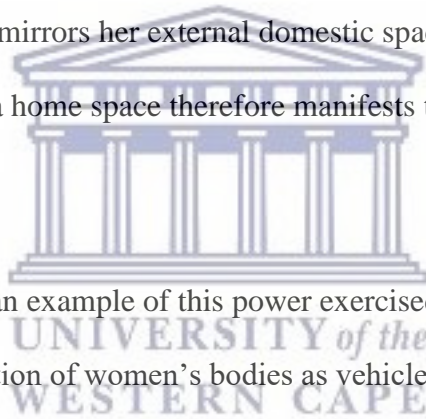
As mentioned earlier, an example of this power exercised over women in the domestic

sphere is through the construction of women's bodies as vehicles of reproduction. In "African

Motherhood – Myth and Reality", Lauretta Ngcobo mentions that African women writers

generally represent motherhood realistically, but still recognise that "in Africa they preserve a

special place of honour for motherhood" (533). She traces the origins of the desire for fertility

to a need for "human capital" and "social security" that has led to institutions of motherhood

such as "fertility rites, taboos and beliefs" (534). Women will continue to carry the blame for

failure to conceive, as men have a duty to immortalise their ancestors and therefore cannot

bear the shame of childlessness (534). As mentioned previously, Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi

discusses the paradoxical nature of this phenomenon in her article "Calixthe Beyala's

'femme-filette': Womanhood and the Politics of (M)Othering":

It is interesting to note here how women's work in the home, that

traditional Marxists referred to as unremunerated work and having only a use-

value, is politicized in a public space of surplus-value, one that recognizes and

rewards biological mothers with a social status that is directly linked not only

to the womb as agent of reproduction but one that also controls the numbers

produced, and the socio-political functions / benefits ascribed to the womb.

What this means is that childless women or women who do not produce

certain quantities [sic] of children are consciously excluded and positioned as

inappropriate Others, as women who have no rights within the public sphere.

(105)

Nfah-Abbenyi highlights the paradox that came to light in the discussion of the

hospital in the previous chapter: whereas women's domestic functions are not recognised as

labour in the public sphere, the product of that labour – successful reproduction – is venerated

as a driving agent of society and the economy. The result is that women do not necessarily

experience the full benefits of their labour; they are marginalised when they do not

successfully perform this function. Within the domestic sphere, women's bodies are therefore

reconstructed as hosts for children to satisfy patriarchal socio-economic expectations.

As a home to her identity, a woman's body can also be the site of patriarchal

hegemonic femininity, which often manifests through body modification and specific

sartorial requirements. In the texts at hand, the level of modification becomes violent when

involuntary female genital excision is performed on young girls.[43] Literary representations of

the practice are mostly the work of men, some early examples of which are Nuruddin Farah's

From a Crooked Rib and *Sardines*; Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*

(Suns of Independence); and *The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngũgĩ wa

Thiong'o. In an editorial for *Feminist Africa* titled "The Politics of Fashion and Beauty in

Africa", Simidele Dosekun notes that women's bodies are prime loci for the exercise of

patriarchal power as they are "figured as symbols/embodiments of the moral standing of

community, family and nation, yet simultaneously as morally weak and polluting; that

women are constructed as the guardians of 'tradition'" (2). This sentiment is enforced in both

public and domestic contexts. Mazumdar and Mazumdar further elaborate on the division

between public and private space in Arab-Islamic cultures as it applies to women's dress.

Women are required to wear dress appropriate to the custom of *hejab* (veil) as practiced in

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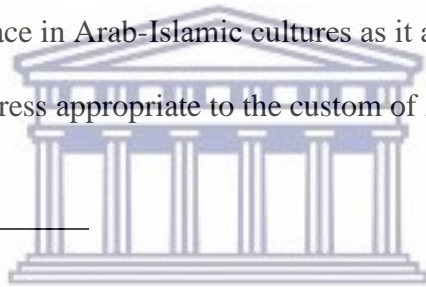
[43] In her study of the representation of excision in women's experiential literature,

titled "Writing Women's Rites: Excision in Experiential African Literature", Chantal Zabus

states that the practice has shifted from being characterised as a "rite" to being a "mutilation"

in literary representations as well as Western feminist criticism (335). Zabus demonstrates the

importance of understanding the geo-historical context in which the practice is performed

when interpreting the experience. For example, in the work of Kenyan women-writers

Rebecca Njau, Muthoni Likimani, Miriam Were and Charity Waciuma, excision is

characterised as an important factor of "social cohesiveness" (336). These texts were written

at the end Jomo Kenyatta's presidency, which championed the practice. Context is therefore

key to understanding the factors that shape the practice, its motivations and the way it is

experienced by women.

their region when entering spaces where they are likely to encounter *na-mahram* men (305).

This is to "maintain social distance, anonymity, and to 'protect' themselves from the gaze of

na-mahram males" (305). In the policing of women's appearances and the conception of

women's bodies as tools for reproduction, the body as a small, secondary home emerges in

the texts under discussion. The body-as-home, together with the image of the porous body

interconnected with domestic space, serve as the primary motifs through which the body is

discussed as a site of patriarchal oppression. In the present chapter, this will be accomplished

through a further unpacking of Krasner's work on the relationship between domestic space

and the body as it pertains to risk and damage.

The Body Written at Risk

For Krasner, the interconnectedness of the subject and the home becomes most

apparent when the body, the home, or both, are at risk. The stress of pain, grief, memory loss

or disease amplifies and lays bare the anxieties that already permeate the subject's perception

of their body and the spaces in their home, as well how they relate to those with whom they

share the space (7). It also forces the subject to "negotiate memory and identity somatically",

thereby grounding experience in the body and tactile relation to the home (7). This emphasis

on the tactility of the body in distress also introduces theories of the abject – that which Julia

Kristeva posits in *The Powers of Horror* is the horrific loss of a distinction between the

subject and object, self and world. Krasner notes that Kristeva and Mary Douglas both argue

that the impure is defined by its exclusion or expulsion from the pure, which requires that the

boundaries of the pure or sacred – in this case the body or the home – must be defined

(Krasner 7). For Krasner, the boundaries of the body – or the self-as-body – is always in

question in the home, as "our domestic lives tend to materialize and externalize our

subjectivity in tangible self-representations and material engagements, located in specific
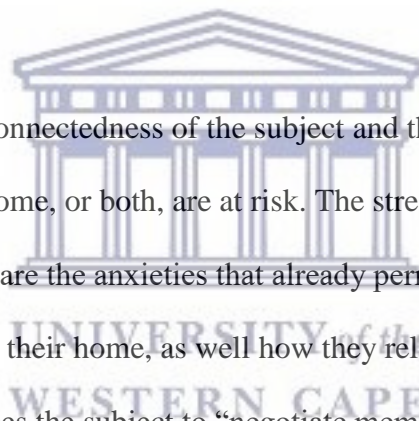
architectural spaces or postural relations to other bodies" (8). An example of such a material

self-representation is the colourful crockery that Bolanle brings home in *The Secret Lives of*

Baba Segi's Wives, as it manifests her unique, creative self in the home, which is filled with

white dishware. This process is one reason why the skin is not as natural a boundary to the

body as one would imagine – the externalisation of identity can also require the assimilation

of various objects into and out of the body space. As the abject involves a process of

extricating the self from that which it is not, it is located at the site of "in between, the

ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 3-4). This operates in a manner similar to the sense of

touch: it requires a blending or temporary dissolution of the boundary between the pure and
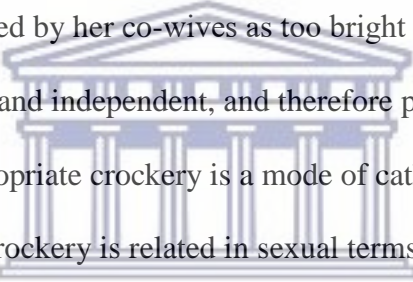
impure, inside and outside.[44]

The distinction between the inner and outer worlds is dissolved in the corporeal,

graphic representation of Baba Segi's open body in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba*

Segi's Wives. The boundaries of Baba Segi's body are penetrable; he expels his emotions

through his bowels whenever he becomes upset, and the narrative is peppered with his

releasing gas, running to a bathroom or vomiting. This porous body functions throughout the

text as a symbol of his weakness as a patriarch. In the gendered boundary discourse

developed by Douglas and, later, psychoanalytically applied by Kristeva, the patriarchal

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[44] In Krasner's view, this kind of abjection is not applicable to tactile study because

the sense of touch already reaffirms the boundary and location of the self, and therefore

precludes the need for its precise location. However, due to the porous and pliable nature of

the skin and the presence of orifices, it can also be argued that any tactile experience also

dissolves the boundary between the subject and environment, or has the potential to do so.

"phallic" male body is clean and closed, in contrast to the dirty, open, porous female body (Kristeva 102). For Krasner, the essence of this is the breach or distortion of the margins of the body (2). Baba Segi is unable to contain those parts of the world that he consumes – his food – within the boundaries of his body, and his form takes on a female openness that undermines his patriarchal status. The monstrous quality of the open body is the subject of the visual aesthetic that Mikhail Bakhtin terms the grotesque in *Rabelais and His World*, which is produced when "the stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it" (26). The grotesque, with its emphasis on the bodily and organic, is used both to celebrate life and reproduction, and mourn death and decay. Both of these themes are central to the Alao family narrative. In Baba Segi's case, the grotesque aesthetic that shadows him is a forewarning of his infertility and the death and destruction that takes place in his home. It is worth noting that his bodily expulsions consistently have adverse effects on his wives, who usually suffer because of the stench, or have to clean up after him. That which is expelled from his body infiltrates their bodies in a very tactile, if subtle, manner. The relationship between the body, gendered power and trauma within the home is therefore established early in the narrative.[45]

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[45] In *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga study how the "spaces occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contract and expand in relationship to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions" (2).

The fundamental inhospitableness of the Alao home is not only a result of the relationships that the women have with one another, but also of how they relate to the home. For Bolanle in particular, her lack of agency and control over her lived environments are mirrored in her body in the event of her rape. This loss of control over her body resulted in the abortion that could have rendered her body inhospitable to future children. The specialist describes it as "damage to the wall of the womb" (39), thereby creating a parallel between her womb and a home through the image of walls as protective boundaries. It is suggested that Bolanle considers herself damaged and hides in the Alao home to heal. This is evidenced not only by her musings on the matter (16), but by her affinity to damaged crockery. A symbol of nurturing, motherly femininity and the ability to provide sustenance for a family, the crockery that Bolanle purchases is rejected by her co-wives as too bright for the household. Bolanle's brand of femininity is too bold and independent, and therefore presents a threat to them. Her purchase of damaged or inappropriate crockery is a mode of catharsis and revolt for her, and her tactile appreciation of the crockery is related in sexual terms:

> I walked to the bus stop on the far side of the market. Once on the bus,
> I opened the plastic bag and fingered the nail-sized stain at the bottom of the
> bowl. I poked it, pricked it and half-heartedly tried to peel it off. I knew it was
> stuck fast and my stomach twisted with excitement. Soon, I was in our street.
> It stretched before me like a lean arm and the Alao house waited at the end of
> it like a large muscular chest, the bamboo scaffolding flexed, dwarfing the
> puny lodges around it. (45)

The Alao home is presented as an imposing masculine body and, as she approaches it, she fondles the stain – the impurity – on the bowl in what can be described as a masturbatory motion, prompting the excitement she feels in her stomach. By embracing her sexuality and

imperfection in this externalised way she is able to reclaim some agency and control over her body and identity before she has to re-enter the controlled, regulated space of her patriarchal home. Bolanle's damaged body and her sexuality are intertwined as a single characterisation of impurity and imperfection – a monstrous body that has been penetrated by the world, and is therefore policed by the masculine figure of her patriarchal home.

Within the Alao home, women's bodies tend to be damaged when they do not comply with the patriarchal order that shapes the space. As discussed in previous chapters, Iya Segi is the patriarch by proxy, as her authority extends beyond that of the matriarch and Baba Segi is characterised as weak and unsuccessful. The difference between a patriarchal woman and a patriarch by proxy is not overly significant, nevertheless I use the term "patriarch by proxy" to mean that the patriarchal woman has essentially assumed the role of the patriarch within the home. Iya Segi not only uses patriarchy to oppress other women – she even supersedes the primary male authority figure. Iya Segi's rule over the bodies in the home is clear: she instructs Iya Femi and Iya Tope to become pregnant by other men, thereby reinforcing hegemonic femininity as reproductive. She also uses her control over the supplies in the household to ensure her co-wives' obedience. For example, when Iya Tope asks for more hair pomade for her daughters, Iya Segi calls her ungrateful and denies her request. As a result, Iya Tope's daughters appear dishevelled, which reflects badly on Iya Tope's suitability as a mother in comparison to Iya Segi. As will be discussed at a later stage, although not all of Iya Segi's mechanisms of control are patriarchal in nature, she is constructed as a patriarch by proxy by the house itself. She also rules the other women through space by controlling their bodies. It is therefore not surprising that these bodies are soiled and damaged from being in the home when Iya Segi's hostility escalates.

When Iya Segi and Iya Femi leave a poisoned plate of chicken for Bolanle in her bedroom, the firstborn daughter Segi eats it. By ingesting the poisoned meal, Segi renders her body vulnerable to the home and Iya Segi's patriarchal spatial control. Before Segi's illness is discovered, the last moment at which Bolanle – the focaliser of the chapter – is aware of Segi's movements, is when she hears Segi arguing with her mother about the fact that Segi was being too friendly with Bolanle (159). As Segi "shuffles" from her mother's bedroom (159), her body indicates her shame at her expulsion from what was intended to be her place of safety and unconditional acceptance. This leaves her vulnerable to the events that follow, without the protection of her mother – the most powerful figure in the home. Segi later utters "a chilling scream [that] pierced the silence in all the rooms of the house" (159). Segi's suffering is caused by the home and the power dynamics it constructs between the wives, and her body disseminates its reaction to the damage throughout the building. With a sound like the "sorrowfully low notes of a trombone" that continues "for an uncomfortable length of time" Segi externalises the damage and prevents it from remaining localised in her body. This blends the boundary between Segi's body and the home – the event of her poisoning is shared by both structures. This is a result of Iya Segi's fear that Bolanle would expose Baba Segi's infertility, thereby bringing shame upon the household according to patriarchal custom. Iya Segi had therefore turned Bolanle's room into a dangerous space by making it a tool for Bolanle's oppression and murder. Segi's entrance into Bolanle's room – a space forbidden to her by her mother – then caused her illness and eventual death, when she consumed the poisoned food.

Segi's screams manifest Iya Segi's patriarchal rule, and their violence distresses the other characters. Bolanle sits up "with a jolt" and "leap[s]" off her bed, leaving her only moderately safe space within the home behind to find the screaming young woman. In the living room, Bolanle finds a confusion of bodies in various states of panic:

Baba Segi, Iya Femi, Segi, and Akin were all in the sitting room. Iya

Segi was there too but standing in the far corner, with her fist in her mouth,

shivering. Black bra straps had fallen onto fat upper arms and her wrapper was

bundled together around her waist. […] [Segi's] father was on his knees next

to her, staring at her as if to absorb her pain. He kept touching her legs and

arms, addressing her in a mix of prayers, pleas and promises. (159)

The key characters are all assembled, aside from Iya Tope, who is at this point

fetching clothes for Baba Segi to wear to the hospital. The pain of her firstborn affects Iya

Segi most acutely, but – as she is also the cause of it – she is relegated to the periphery of the

room. Her own body registers her grief and fear: her fist is in her mouth, she is shivering, and

her clothes are in disarray. Baba Segi is on his knees, in the position of servitude in which we

find his wives and children in front of him at the beginning of the narrative. His pleading

touch and begging posture symbolises the temporary removal of his patriarchal authority in

the face of the mortal risk to the most important source of his masculinity – his successful

reproduction. In this way, the damage to Segi's body transcends the porous boundary that is

her skin, and spreads through the home, including the bodies of her parents. Iya Segi's

patriarchal rule therefore constructs and is constructed by the home space in a dual process:

the pain that Segi suffers due to her mother's transformation of Bolanle's room into a hostile

space reverberates back into the home, and rearranges and disrupts the other bodies within it.

The violence of Iya Segi's regime is also enacted in unsettling detail upon Segi's body

to the extent that the young woman becomes an object. Segi's condition is focalised by

Bolanle: "from where she was standing, all Bolanle could see were Segi's feet lying on the

floor. They flexed and contracted as if she was in the throes of an epileptic fit" (159). Bolanle

describes Segi's feet as disembodied objects, at once familiar and horrifying. The pain and

illness has made Segi's body foreign. This is reiterated at a later stage when Baba Segi returns from the hospital with the news that Segi's hair is falling out, and that "if she as much as brushed her finger against her ear, her hair dropped onto the pillow like the feather from a fowl steeped in boiling water" (166). As mentioned earlier, hair is a point of contention and pride in the home. Iya Segi controls Iya Tope's access to hair pomade (72) to ensure that Iya Tope's children's hair is not in as good a condition as that of her own children. Therefore, when her firstborn child's hair falls out, it is a foreshadowing of Iya Segi's eventual fall from her position of power in the home. The description of Segi's hair as a "feather" falling from a "fowl steeped in boiling water" removes her agency as a human and reconstructs her as an object; a sacrifice to the greed and hostility within the home.

The reverberating violence not only disrupts the other bodies, but also causes serious damage to them. Iya Segi takes advantage of the chaotic atmosphere by blaming Bolanle for Segi's illness and physically attacking her. Bolanle sustains a head wound and, upon regaining consciousness, she sees the "large tie-dye blood stain on her pillow" and the blood flakes on her shoulders and thinks to herself that she will "die in [that] house" (164). Iya Segi punishes Bolanle for inadvertently threatening her control of the home and the taboo exposure of Baba Segi's infertility. When Segi is taken to the hospital, her removal from the home disrupts the normal flow in both tactile and virtual ways. Iya Tope is covered in vomit, and looks like she would "shed her skin too, if she could" (164). The children sob, and refuse to wear clothing (165). Iya Segi's violent patriarchal rule of the home has caused her to accidentally kill her daughter, and to damage and disrupt the bodies of the other wives to

varying degrees.[46] The interconnectedness between the situated body and domestic space has thus allowed for Iya Segi to exercise her patriarchal control through the bodies of the other women, causing them damage in the process.

Bodies interconnected with their spatial surroundings also feature prominently in *Swallow,* as the title of the text suggests. The female body is an important site of patriarchal rule in this text. Tolani's and Rose's flat reaches the peak of its disrepair when the septic tank is damaged and envelops the complex in the stench of human waste. At the same time, they also suffer the latest in a series of power cuts. Rose, frustrated, tells Tolani: "Look at us in this place, one problem after the other, one disaster after another. Instead of sticking together, we're fighting each other. I can't stand it. Me, I'm getting out" (105). Rose's impoverished living conditions catalyse her decision to leave her life of poverty – for which the flat is a metonym – behind at all costs (104). The avenue she finds is profoundly patriarchal in nature, as she decides to use her body as a vehicle – an object – for transportation (104). Her usefulness to OC as a smuggler is directly related to the porosity of her body through her mouth and anus. The fact that her body is female is also important to OC, as women are less frequently suspected of drug trafficking than men are. In her decision to swallow the condom, Rose acquiesces to a toxic, phallic penetration of her body space and becomes a host for patriarchal power, which eventually destroys it from within. Rose thus decides to swallow her

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[46] Bolanle's actions show strong contrast. For example, when Iya Tope suffers the pain of constipation, Bolanle immediately comes to her aid by buying her medicine. Iya Tope had no-one else to help her, and notes that if it were not for Bolanle, her "stomach would have split open" (55).

agency, rather than express it, by giving her body space to a patriarchal, capitalist agenda.
The fact that she dies as a result of this decision when the condom ruptures in her stomach
only confirms that her body was a disposable object in the system into which she sold herself.
When Tolani learns of Rose's death in the newspaper, Rose no longer has her own identity,
as she is referred to by her alias, Sidi Raheem (247). She dies invisible, and OC's only
response is that Rose was a "bad investment" (249). Rose's death was caused by her
complicity in subjecting her own body to a patriarchal capitalist agenda, a decision she would
likely not have made had her material living space been more bearable.

Although Rose's untimely death is caused by a combination of her involvement with
OC, her socio-economic circumstances and her decision to subject herself to objectification,
she is not the only victim affected by her decisions. Rose very nearly convinces Tolani to
become a drug mule herself. Although Tolani can see the desperation in her friend, she notes
that Rose "was not deceiving herself; she was trying to deceive [Tolani]" (141). Tolani is
wounded by this abuse of their friendship and is even more disconcerted when she finds out
that Rose had also tried to recruit their neighbour, the nurse Mrs Durojaiye, and only asked
Tolani after Mrs Durojaiye declined the offer (250). As a divorced nurse with three unruly
children, Mrs Durojaiye is very vulnerable to exploitation, especially as she is experiencing
further hardship while the government withholds her salary and violent strikes are taking
place at the hospital where she works. Despite Tolani's initial refusal, she accepts Rose's
offer after she experiences her own misfortunes. She is suspended from work for reporting
Mr Salako's sexual harassment, and then finds out that her partner Sanwo had lost the money
she had lent him. Tolani explains: "Hard living became harder for some reason or the other,
and we became broke, and there was no means of recovering, and no one to depend on, and
then someone offered us a way out" (207). Neither of the women was forced into the
situation but yielded as a result of systemic pressures enacted upon them as isolated, poor
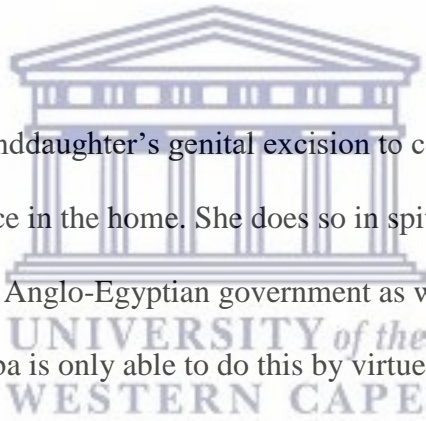
women at the margins of the city. Although Rose manages to convince Tolani to become a trafficker for OC, Tolani is unable to swallow the condom. She repeatedly vomits "from the roof of [her] mouth" before she can swallow, as if there is "an invisible wall covering [her] throat" (212). Atta's description of Tolani's attempts to swallow depicts Tolani's body as a home through the images of a "wall" and "roof" in her mouth. Tolani bodily rejects the abject moment at which the convergence of self and world, subject and object takes place. She explains this to Rose: "My spirit will not allow me to be a smuggler. I've tried and I cannot swallow" (227). This abjection is particularly relevant in Tolani's case, as much of what keeps her from going through with the drug deal is her sense of self – she is not willing to give up her identity and values for an easier life. Rose, on the other hand, does this quite literally by assuming a false identity. She swallows the condom, and in the process not only loses her sense of self but also her life. Her determination to escape her malodorous, unsafe domestic space – a constant reminder of her poverty – allows her to ignore whatever warnings her body gives her. She also places Tolani in danger and renders their home vulnerable to patriarchal influence. Therefore, much as Iya Segi's patriarchal regime damages the bodies of Bolanle and Segi in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* Rose's decision to serve a patriarchal agenda and give it power over their domestic space endangers both her own body and Tolani's body.

Like the violent outcomes of patriarchy in *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* in *Lyrics Alley,* the competition between co-wives Nabilah and Waheeba reaches its climax in an act of violence on the body of Nabilah's daughter Ferial. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Nabilah angers Waheeba during her only visit to Waheeba's quarters by unwittingly insulting her in front of her friends. In the aftermath, Nabilah storms off in a rage and Waheeba retaliates by orchestrating a plan to have Ferial's genital excision performed along with another young girl in Waheeba's household, named Zeinab. Waheeba's

plan relies entirely on the proximity of their quarters and the vulnerability of Ferial's young body:

> While Nabilah was at the airport, Ferial was lured over to Waheeba's quarters. She was told that Zeinab was having a party and that there would be sweets and many girls her age to play with. Indeed, it *was* a celebration of sorts for Zeinab, though it was kept low-key because Mahmoud had forbidden circumcision in his household since the procedure was declared illegal by the Anglo-Egyptian government. Clearly, his authority had been overridden by Waheeba, who insisted that her granddaughter [Zeinab] must follow tradition. (186)
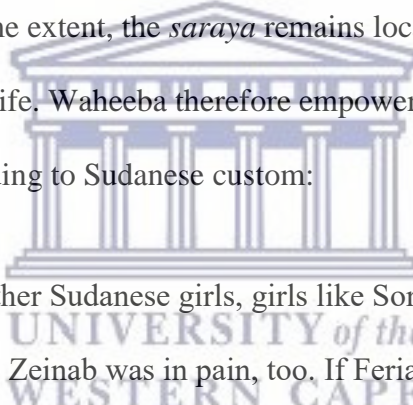
Waheeba plans her granddaughter's genital excision to coincide with Nabilah's trip to the airport to ensure her absence in the home. She does so in spite of the fact that both scales of patriarchal rule – that of the Anglo-Egyptian government as well as of her husband – had forbidden the practice. Waheeba is only able to do this by virtue of her own and Nabilah's shared domestic space. In abusing her status as Nabilah's co-wife, Waheeba is able to access Ferial by virtue of proximity. She also violates Nabilah's safety and privacy, manifested in her wing of the home, by mutilating Ferial's body. Waheeba further uses an aspect of her domestic space that Nabilah criticises for its Sudanese primitiveness[47] – the traditional bed – as a tool to perform the excision: "Waheeba held down [Ferial's] upper body while her heels were tucked through the bed so that she wouldn't kick the midwife. That was why there were

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[47] This is discussed in the first chapter, where the wives' respective wings of the *saraya* are examined as microcosms of the national spaces of Egypt and Sudan.

now marks on her feet from the ropes that made up the base of the angharaib" (188). Through Waheeba's domestic space, Sudanese national culture is written on Ferial's body not only through the excision procedure, but also through the marks that her feet bear as a result of violent contact with the space. Consequently, although Nabilah vacates the *saraya* and returns to Egypt with Ferial, sharing a domestic space with Waheeba has forever scarred Ferial's body – her Sudanese heritage will remain with her in Egypt. Allegorically, Ferial's excision highlights the fact that Nabilah and her family are located in Sudanese territory. Although the Anglo-Egyptian government prohibits female genital excision and Sudan remains governed by its laws, Sudan is approaching independence and is strengthening its national identity. Waheeba's act therefore serves as a crude reminder to Nabilah that although she may rule the *saraya* to some extent, the *saraya* remains located within Sudan, which is the territory of the Sudanese wife. Waheeba therefore empowers herself by ensuring that childrearing takes place according to Sudanese custom:

> She'll be like other Sudanese girls, girls like Soraya and Fatma. If
> Ferial was now in pain, Zeinab was in pain, too. If Ferial was now
> traumatised, Zeinab was traumatised, too. Waheeba herself had held the girls
> down one by one, gripping their knees apart. The deed was done and the
> procedure was irreversible. The slice of a knife, the tug and cutting away of
> flesh, and Ferial was someone else, one of *them*. She could never be like her
> mother again. (186)

This paragraph, focalised by Nabilah, indicates the effect that Ferial's excision has on her mother's view of her. As discussed in earlier chapters, Nabilah is prone to exclusionary thinking on geopolitical bases; she now sees Ferial as "one of *them*" – a Sudanese other. Nabilah carefully raised Ferial as Egyptian, and the girl's fair skin, straight hair and accent

marked her as such. By inscribing Sudanese national space on Ferial's body, Waheeba is alienating Ferial from her mother.

Both Waheeba's need for revenge and her execution of it are produced by patriarchal space. Firstly, Waheeba's actions are motivated by the domestic patriarchal system that constructs her relationship with Nabilah as competitive. Waheeba's position as the senior wife, and thereby her security, are compromised by the fact that Mahmoud only lives in Nabilah's space. Secondly, Waheeba uses the national patriarchal context of Sudan to justify performing the excision. The procedure is described in visceral, evocative terms such as "gripped", "slice", "tug" and "cutting", and the image of Waheeba physically holding the girls down casts her as a violent, oppressive figure. Ferial's body as space is therefore also used as a tool in Ferial and Nabilah's patriarchal oppression. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Waheeba also leverages her proximity to Nabilah's quarters to access Ferial in order to execute her plan.
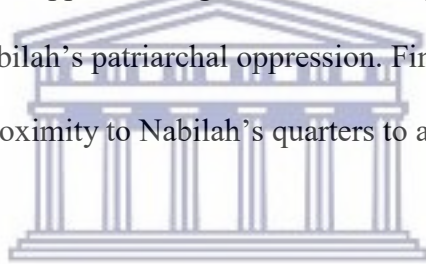
In *The Tent,* by contrast with *Lyrics Alley,* Fatima's experience of genital excision is second hand, as it is performed on her servant Sardoub's niece, Sasa. Sasa's genital excision forms part of the narrative's overall treatment of women as trapped within their gendered bodies. Fatima listens in horror as Sasa "screamed in the locked room and the blood ran down between her thighs" (54). She hears tales of her mother being strangled by her father and witnesses her multiple miscarriages (31, 49), and hears her grandmother blaming her mother for these events. Fatima is convinced that Sasa is going to die as a result of her excision, and she is acutely aware of the fact that neither Sasa nor her mother have control over the reasons for their punishment. The women around her offer her no explanation or justification for these events – they ignore her, and her grandmother expressly encourages the mistreatment and rejection of women's bodies. It is therefore no surprise that Fatima finally rejects her own

body as a home space because it can be used to incarcerate her. She continually injures herself by taking unnecessary risks: she breaks both her legs and sustains a cut on her face that creates a scar. Her hair grows long and unruly, and toward the end of the novel she sleeps in what resembles a rat's nest. She throws away her crutch and crawls around the property, followed by Sardoub's pleas for her to "get up out of the dirt" (83). As with Ferial in *Lyrics Alley,* Sasa's excision is an example of the way women's bodies are used as a means to subjugate them to patriarchal rule – in both cases at the behest of other women.
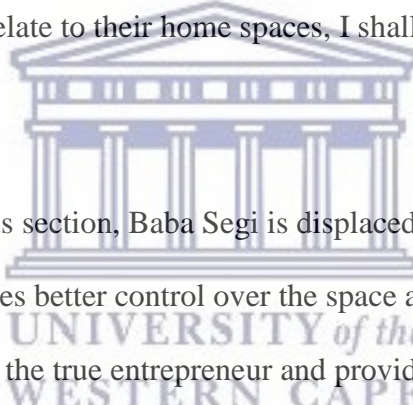
The body-as-home with its porous connection to domestic space is a mechanism through which patriarchal women can control and oppress other women. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* Baba Segi's overly porous body renders him weak, and Iya Segi as the patriarch by proxy finds him easy to control. From this it is clear that patriarchy is a structure of domination that is not determined by gender. By virtue of the domestic space and its organisation, Iya Segi is more extreme a patriarch than Baba Segi, despite the fact that she is a woman. Her strict rule over the Alao home inspires revolt in Bolanle in the form of her sensual enjoyment of bright, imperfect crockery, but Iya Segi prevents Bolanle from externalising her identity within the home through objects that represent her. Iya Segi's need to expel Bolanle's body from the home eventually results in the inadvertent killing of her own daughter. Segi's illness reverberates through the home and the bodies of the other occupants, resulting in soiling, fighting and hunger – all results of Iya Segi's patriarchal control of Bolanle's femininity. In *Swallow,* Rose advances OC's patriarchal agenda by agreeing to turn her body into an object for smuggling, and temporarily convincing Tolani to do the same. This exercise of patriarchal control over the body-as-space for transportation places both women in serious danger and causes Rose's eventual death. Similarly, in *Lyrics Alley,* Waheeba's need to compete with Nabilah is inspired by patriarchal ways of assigning use-value to women. She embodies a traditional patriarchal femininity in order to use Ferial's

body as a weapon against Nabilah, thereby succeeding in driving her from the home and the

country. Finally, in *The Tent*, both Sasa's genital excision and the deterioration of Fatima's

body in her captive state are consequences of the women in the household's maintenance of

patriarchal hegemonic femininity. In the next section, I discuss how these same power

dynamics are exercised in domestic space through elements other than the body. I examine

the ways patriarchal women characters control and oppress other women directly through

physical elements of domestic space such as rooms, gates, walls and furniture.

Maintaining Boundaries in Unhomely Literary Homes

For the characters in *Lyrics Alley, The Tent* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's*

Wives, the home is a generally stable, static place for men, with the exception of the nomadic

father in *The Tent*, although he too returns to the same space between visits. Women, on the

other hand, move between domestic spaces. Generally, the woman moves from the home of

her father to the home of her husband, and if either of these men leaves her life, she is no

longer welcome in the home. The exception here is Iya Femi, who enters an interim home as

a domestic worker when her father dies. She manages to orchestrate her departure from her

cruel mistress' home by convincing Taju – Baba Segi's driver – to ask Baba Segi to marry

her. Women's sense of stability and security is therefore entirely contingent upon their

relationships with men. In her introduction to *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social*

Maps, Shirley Ardener notes that this is a common phenomenon: "[A] man's birthplace

remains his home base, with all the psychological and material support this provides,

throughout his life, while a woman may pass from place to place, a stranger crossing

boundaries into new family structures on new ground, from which she can later withdraw or

be ejected (see Callaway)" (25). Such domestic spaces therefore inherently shape and are

shaped by patriarchal power. Women struggle for agency in their homes, and in many cases

they do not succeed, even if the home is financially maintained by women's labour, as is the case with Arike in *Swallow*. This is especially problematic as far as childrearing is concerned, as women are held responsible for the children's upbringing yet do not have control over their environment. As Lauretta Ngcobo points out, "[t]he major weakness in this formidable role of motherhood is that women can only exercise it from the outside, for they remain marginalized at their new husband's homes" (534). Although Baba Segi's extended family does not share the home, as is the case in the contexts that Ngcobo analyses, these characteristics are also integral to Bolanle and Iya Tope's experiences as co-wives. The "permanent state of dependence and estrangement" that Ngcobo identifies also results in an outsider wife being "the first suspect when things go wrong" (535). Through the analysis of the ways different characters relate to their home spaces, I shall examine how patriarchal women control other women.

As noted in the previous section, Baba Segi is displaced as the patriarch of the Alao home by Iya Segi, who exercises better control over the space and outperforms him in terms of economic success. Iya Segi, the true entrepreneur and provider, is the patriarch by proxy in the Alao home. For F. Fiona Moolla in "The Polygynous Household in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*: A Haven in a Heartless World", this is an inversion of an older model of the literary Nigerian polygamous household:

> Thus, what we see in this novel from a "third generation" Nigerian
> writer, is a twenty-first century perversion of the cooperation and protective
> hierarchies of the polygynous household of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.
> While in Achebe's novel, which casts a retrospective glance at pre-colonial
> Nigerian society, the first wife is a genuinely motherly figure at the head of a
> household where childcare, household duties and husband management are a

collective responsibility, in the twenty-first century urban plural marriage, the

first wife is presented as a competitive, acquisitive, lustful "masculine"

character who manipulates her husband and the other wives to her own

advantage. (Moolla 86)

Iya Segi's position as patriarch is not only established by this masculine

characterisation, but also by her relational definition by the other characters. She is in

complete control of their access to provisions, monitors their movements within and outside

of the home, and is also the primary breadwinner. A key example of this contrast between the

nurturing matriarch and Iya Segi's power-hungry approach is the event mentioned earlier:

when Iya Tope asks her for more hair cream for her daughters to relieve their itching scalps,

Iya Segi does not prioritise the children's needs. Instead, she relishes the power she has to

deny Iya Tope her wish. The homosocial relationships between the co-wives is the primary

source of patriarchal control in their lives, rather than their exposure to men.

As Iya Segi's authority over Iya Femi and Iya Tope is absolute, it is to be expected

that she singles out Bolanle as the only wife that poses a threat to her. She considers the other

two wives to be like "humble maidservants who live for a kind pat on the head from the

mother-of-the-home" (104). Iya Femi's prowess as a domestic worker wins her some favour

with Iya Segi, but both women treat Iya Tope with disdain and cruelty. To Iya Segi's mind,

she is incontrovertibly the highest authority: "They know that *I* am the true provider. My

husband only thinks he controls this household and I let him believe that he does. I *want* him

to believe he does but *I* am the one who keeps his household together. Good things happen

here because *I* allow them. *I* alone can approve vengeance and only *I* know how to bring

calm" (104). She is proud of her ability to manipulate Baba Segi to do her bidding, and

emphasises that all activities within the home are under her control. This manifests most
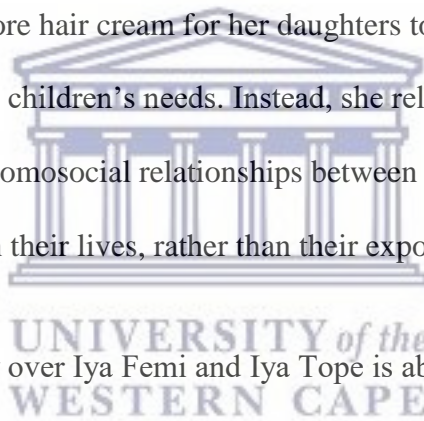
clearly in her distribution of the provisions to the other wives, and the ways she uses this

process to remind them of their subservience to her. Bolanle, however, poses a risk due to her

formal education, and her ability to expose the other wives' infidelity. To remedy this, Iya

Segi utilises patriarchal norms to transform the Alao home into a hostile space for the

youngest wife. Within hours of Bolanle's arrival, Iya Segi denies her access to a comfortable

chair in the living room. Iya Tope, the focaliser, is confused by the senior wife's actions:

> The tradition was that the comfort of an armchair had to be earned,
> which meant that unless you were pregnant, with oedema, breastfeeding or
> watching over toddlers, you were not entitled to one. To impress his new wife,
> Baba Segi spent thirty minutes in the dimly lit storeroom dusting, slapping and
> wiping before finally pushing another armchair into the living room. Iya Segi
> and Iya Femi shook with anger when she sat among us. I asked myself: what is
> in a chair? Is it not just to sit down? Did she not have a chair in her father's
> house? (53-54)
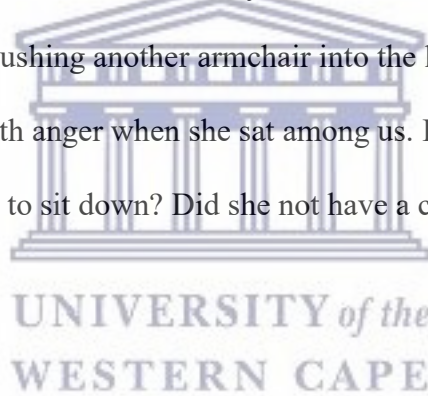
As Iya Segi and Iya Femi are already threatened by Bolanle due to her formal

education, they cannot tolerate Baba Segi giving her preferential treatment. Iya Tope is less

concerned with the abstract and symbolic; given that Bolanle had moved from one patriarchal

space to another, it made sense to Iya Tope that the same rules would apply in her new

context. That Bolanle can only earn a chair if she conforms to hegemonic femininity by

bearing a child is preferable to the more competitive wives, as they know she cannot succeed

at this. When it becomes apparent that Bolanle is not so easily impregnated, Iya Segi uses the

opportunity to convince Baba Segi to remove Bolanle's armchair. She tells him that comfort

makes "the female form complacent", and reminds him that, as a woman, she is an authority

on the topic (54). Iya Segi thus uses patriarchal custom to make the living room – a space

expected to facilitate relaxation and comfort – an uncomfortable space for the youngest wife.

The stool Bolanle subsequently has to sit on is a reminder of her lowly status as a wife who

has not borne children in a patriarchal home. Iya Segi turns the very furniture into a tool for

Bolanle's oppression.

Iya Segi further transforms the home into a hostile place by expelling Bolanle's

friends. Having friendly faces and pleasant memories within the home helps Bolanle to

construct it as a positive place that can contain allies – a supportive female homosocial space.

To banish them, Iya Segi once again evokes notions of appropriate conduct for young women

that could be undermined by bad influences. Iya Tope focalises Iya Segi's approach to

oppressing Bolanle: "Iya Segi told our husband that they were bad role models for the

daughters in the family, especially for her daughter, Segi, who was at an impressionable age"

(54). Iya Segi leverages the assumption that unmarried women are immoral and have the

potential to corrupt younger women. This concern largely stems from a patriarchal

possessiveness over female sexuality. As Iya Segi's argument plays into Baba Segi's

possessive tendencies, she uses him as a tool to oppress Bolanle, and the walls of the house to

construct a social boundary. Although Bolanle resists a verbal disagreement on the matter,

she goes to the market (54) to stage her revolt: she purchases brightly coloured crockery with

imperfections that the other co-wives dislike. As discussed earlier, the crockery represents an

uncontrolled, imperfect and vibrant femininity that Bolanle is not allowed to embody within

the domestic space under Iya Segi's patriarchal control. As a result, Bolanle displays the

crockery within her bedroom, walled off from the rest of the house and therefore not

contaminating Iya Segi's domain. Eventually, Bolanle surrenders completely and destroys the

crockery. She buries it in the backyard, hiding her shame and incompatible femininity, and

uses the unoccupied space in her bedroom for a crib. This signals her renewed commitment to

conform to the hegemonic femininity established by the patriarchal order in her household.

Iya Segi once more exploits the patriarchal fear of transgressive femininity when she attempts to convince Baba Segi that Bolanle plans to murder him. To falsely incriminate Bolanle, Iya Segi and Iya Femi place objects of witchcraft in her bedroom. As this small, private space is Bolanle's only domain within the home, it is an extension of her person. By placing these items in her bedroom, the other wives are marking Bolanle as a witch – an ultimate threat to patriarchal society. In "Women and the State in Nigeria: The Case of the Federal Military Government 1984-85", Carolyne Dennis notes: "The religions of many Nigerian societies recognised the social importance of women by emphasising the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but women were also associated with witchcraft, which appeared to symbolise the potential social danger of women exercising their power uncontrolled by men" (14). By characterising Bolanle as a witch, Iya Segi and Iya Femi evoke a reactive patriarchal revenge that would counter this transgressive female power. Returning home, Bolanle's first sign that something is amiss is the smell of "Mama Elepa's groundnuts burning" (57). The burning of food is a failure to hegemonic femininity, as the woman's key priority of cooking meals for the family has been neglected. Bolanle's co-wives accuse her of the ultimate betrayal of patriarchy: witchcraft aimed at the destruction of the patriarch. Baba Segi confronts her with the evidence, which is a rodent's skull with a four-inch nail protruding from it, and its mouth bound by red thread, as well as a calabash containing a spool of white thread half-immersed in blood (59-60). The alleged intent of the *juju* is to kill Baba Segi, whose porous body is considered vulnerable to supernatural forces within the home. Bolanle's alleged witchery has therefore transformed the home into a dangerous place for him. Bolanle manages to convince Baba Segi of her innocence, and her co-wives are outraged. As a result, Baba Segi tells Iya Femi she is welcome to leave the Alao home and sleep in the "gutter" she came from, and orders Iya Segi to perform her traditional wifely duty of cleaning the home (62). In this moment, he briefly regains control of the home

space, and as a result Bolanle is allowed to return to the safe space of her bedroom, a reprieve from Iya Segi's unforgiving rule. Although Baba Segi's authority is also patriarchal and oppressive in nature, he does not stand to benefit from rendering the home hostile to his wives. It is to Bolanle's advantage that he is in control, as she now has a safer space in which to live. This suggests that in this small space of the home, it is possible for women such as Iya Segi to function as stronger agents of patriarchy than men.

Although Bolanle's educated femininity threatens her co-wives, her status as a graduate does not benefit her within the patriarchal context of the Alao domestic space. Iya Femi's prowess as a cook and cleaner is much more valuable to the Alao household than Bolanle's grace and ability to read. When Bolanle eventually cracks under the strain of this consistent pressure to adapt her femininity to suit the needs of the household, she externalises this shift by modifying her only safe space within the home, her bedroom:

> As soon as I got home, I ran to my bedroom and pulled on a pair of worn jeans. I forced my arm under my bed and pulled out an old cardboard box. Then I knelt before my stack of crockery and, one by one, crushed them against each other. *The Long Honeymoon* tried to flee my fingers when I groped under the bed for it; I threw it in the box. I gathered all the mementos I'd kept over the years: the single earring that Segun, the landlord's son, had given me when I turned eighteen. Just wear it like a pendant, he said. In went the hairpiece that Baba Segi said looked like a horse's tail. All the love letters I'd written to myself – the sort I'd have liked to receive. I tore up every one and sprinkled the pieces around the box like confetti. (94)

In a purge, Bolanle erases the brand of femininity that she had constructed within her parental home. The box of memorabilia that she had brought with her was only relevant within the context of that space – in that paradigm, her education, autonomy and dreams as a woman were far more relevant. The boundaries of this box form the boundaries of Bolanle's identity, safe within the walls of her bedroom, which cannot be accessed by her co-wives but does play host to Baba Segi. This is further enclosed within the walls of the house, which isolates Bolanle from her friends and family. Her ideas of beauty, romance and autonomy are thus contained and packed away along with the crockery that symbolises her transgressive and autonomous brand of womanhood, and she heaves these items past the other wives and out of the home. She expels her old self that was constructed within and by her parental domestic life, and burns it in the backyard. When she returns to her bedroom, she sees the emptiness of her sanctuary as her having created "space for a cot" (95). Bolanle had to expel her former self in order to make room for the more traditional, motherly femininity that she is expected to perform within the confines of the Alao home, and transforming her bedroom is her act concretising this new femininity in space.

Iya Segi's rule over the Alao home is similar to what she experienced in the home of her youth. Her control over Baba Segi and her co-wives mirrors the way her mother belittled and insulted the memory of Iya Segi's absent father, and carefully policed Iya Segi's identity according to patriarchal norm. This is most evident in the way Iya Segi's mother discourages her economic independence. Her desire to own her own home is thwarted by her mother's determination to have her daughter conform:

> I troubled Mama about getting my own quarters; I was tired of
>
> squeezing past her at every doorway.
>
> "I have told you before that you cannot buy land and build your own

house. The village men will say you are ridiculing them, doing what they

can't!"

"But it is just a house, Mama!"

"And they will tear it down and burn it, daughter!" (97-98)

Her mother's control over the home and Iya Segi's life is signified by the size of the

mother's body: she is the ruling figure of the home, and there is no space for Iya Segi's needs

or alternative beliefs. Being limited by the inadequacy of the men in her village is an

enormous frustration to her, especially given that she is more attracted to women than to men.

Whereas for others, economic success equates to freedom, for Iya Segi it only serves to

intensify her feeling of being trapped in a system that subjugates her. She cannot embrace her

brand of femininity in public, as it is too "masculine" to be acceptable to the people in her

town. This is further complicated by Iya Segi's queer identity; she wishes to own a double

story house that would accommodate her alternative sexuality, and she wishes to build this

for a woman she desires. Iya Segi's mother's behaviour again suggests that patriarchy does

not attach to a particular character, but is a product of the spatial arrangement of power. This

is also suggested when Baba Segi reclaims his patriarchal authority from Iya Segi at the end

of the novel. Iya Segi's infidelity is exposed when the medical examinations conclude that

Bolanle's womb is not damaged after all, but Baba Segi is infertile due to a bout of illness as

a child. Iya Segi did not succeed in her goal of removing Bolanle from the household. Despite

the shame of his infertility, Baba Segi regains control of the space. Iya Segi's infidelity – and

her encouragement of infidelity in her co-wives – breached the boundaries of the home. She

threatens the structure of the nuclear family to the extent that she conceived her daughter

through intercourse with Taju – Baba Segi's driver – in Baba Segi's armchair. In desecrating

this patriarchal throne, Iya Segi disrupts the patriarchal power balance in the home – which is only restored when Baba Segi reclaims the role of patriarch.

Just as the young Iya Segi's achievable dream to own her home is denied due to her status as a woman, Iya Femi undergoes a similar trauma as a child. When Iya Femi's parents die in a car accident, Iya Femi believes it is her right to inherit her family home – or at the very least continue to live in it. However, her uncle and his opportunistic wife inherit the house instead because Iya Femi has no right to it. Her uncle's wife is quick to make her understand that "[a] girl cannot inherit her father's house because it is everyone's prayer that she will marry and make her husband's home her own" (121). As with Iya Segi's denial of her dream to own her own property, Iya Femi is also told by a woman that she cannot inherit her father's house. For both women, the primary justification given is patriarchal: they cannot own a house because then they will not be married to a husband. The young Iya Femi is so enraged that she physically attacks her uncle's wife, as she is the woman who stands to benefit from this arrangement. Her rebellion takes the form of an assault on the body as place; she wants to open it up and render it weak in order for her to destroy it. As discussed in the previous chapter, Iya Femi's relatives arrange for her employment as a live-in domestic worker, after which she is translocated into Baba Segi's home by her own design. Much like Bolanle, she sees Baba Segi's home – the first home in which she has her own bedroom (130) – as a refuge despite Iya Segi's rule. Iya Femi eventually exacts her revenge against her uncle's wife when she burns down her parents' home with the woman trapped inside (135). Although she does not kill the woman, and allows her to escape, Iya Femi destroys the building to regain control over the home she was denied due to patriarchal hegemonic femininity. She renders it a neutral space, no longer owned by anyone, and therefore feels that justice has been done.
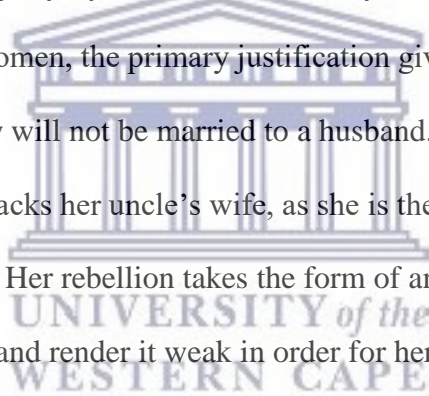
In *Swallow,* Tolani and Rose are in the privileged position of having control over their living arrangements up until the point that Rose becomes dependent on a man. Tolani and Rose struggle against the pull of poverty that pervades in Lagos, and the fact that they are both women makes their economic situation even more precarious. Rose becomes dependent on OC, her new male benefactor, to pay her rent:

> At the end of the month, OC paid her rent, and she began to come home with new shoes. "I don't even like them," she said, flinging a pair on the floor one evening. The shoes fell by my feet. They were white with navy heels. I had a skirt and blouse to match perfectly, and I'd just returned from work. "They're nice," I said. "You can have them," she said. […] My smile didn't reach my eyes. Rose had been sleeping most of the day. Four pairs of high-heeled shoes were between us, the kind of shoes that I liked. (72-73)

In this scene, Tolani loses ownership of her space in two ways: by letting OC pay her half of the rent, Rose grants him a measure of authority over their flat without Tolani's consent. Although this is a symbolic right at best, OC does, in fact, invade the safety of Tolani's flat in the middle of the night toward the end of the narrative, and threatens her with violence. What is more, Rose transforms from being Tolani's equal and ally in a struggling, poverty-stricken life to a woman of leisure. Shoes can be read as a symbol of women's desire for class mobility in the text, and having the heels fall "by her feet" (72) when they are economically unattainable is emotionally taxing for Tolani. Rose's particular form of leisure also takes on a slovenly, masculine character, to Tolani's annoyance: "What I wasn't prepared for was to come home in the evenings and find her lying on the sofa like some rich madam, watching television. She was drinking beer like water now, drinking and falling asleep" (65). Although Tolani describes her as acting like "some rich madam", watching

television, drinking beer and sleeping on the couch are associated with male entitlement to leisure. The link between the performance of hegemonic, patriarchal masculinity and the consumption of beer is well-established in studies of Anglo-American as well as African cultures.[48] In such contexts, beer is considered a leisure item that women produce but to which men are entitled (Suggs 242). Rose thus performs a similar patriarchal masculine household role that is partially enabled by a man's financial support. Rose's sense of entitlement has even extended to Tolani's possessions. For example, when Tolani dishes herself some of her yam pottage, she finds that Rose had eaten some of it, without attempting to conceal her transgression (75). The fact that Rose does not have the same economic constraints as Tolani and still eats her food is a clear indication that her presence in the home had become oppressive since OC had taken over agency of her life. Tolani finds the extent of OC's presence in her and Rose's lives so disconcerting that she says to her fiancé Sanwo that she wants to move out as soon as possible (77). Tolani's safe and private space is transformed into one from which she feels alienated due to Rose's relationship with OC and her adoption of his patriarchal agenda. Rose's dependence on OC and her subsequent embodiment of an exploitative masculine presence in the home renders Tolani vulnerable to patriarchal

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[48] See, for example, David Suggs' article "'These young chaps think they are just men, too': Redistributing Masculinity in Kgatleng Bars", Sarah Gee and Steve Jackson's article "The Southern Man City as Cultural Place and Speight's Space: Locating the Masculinity-Sport-Beer 'Holy Trinity' in New Zealand", and Anne Kelk Mager's book *Beer Drinking as a Microcosm for South African History: Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa*.

oppression in her domestic space. The domestic space is penetrated by patriarchal power, but is void of men and other patriarchal women. The space thus creates boundaries that allow Rose to behave in a patriarchal manner in this small space.

The boundaries of the domestic space in *The Tent* unambiguously frame it as a place of entrapment for women. This is all the more apparent when contrasted with the freedom with which Grandmother Hakima – discussed in the previous chapter as the patriarch by proxy – and Fatima's father move between spaces. This freedom is signified in the title of the novel which references the Bedouin tent that her father erects just outside the walls of the home – a freedom forever within Fatima's view but out of her grasp as a woman. Fatima's experience of her home life is narrated with frequent mention of gates, fences, bars, doors, walls and hedges. The main gate which encloses the yard is often a focal point for Fatima, who notes that although one person cannot open it on their own, the small door in the middle of the gate has a latch small enough for a servant girl to lift (15-16). Fatima climbs trees in order to see over the walls into the town, which she describes at length and with excitement. She also describes her father's goat-hair tent, and the peasants in the distance (16). After one particular session in such a tree, Fatima notes that she feels as though she is "falling deeper and deeper into a bottomless well" (16). The well in their yard is both a physical and mental place. Fatima's madness develops largely within the well, which carries associations of the destruction of female freedom, as Grandmother Hakima threw the head of Fatima's pet gazelle into this well upon its death. Fatima's mental well therefore symbolises her depression and hopelessness in the face of enclosure – which is why she attempts to escape its depths by climbing the trees and staring out over the walls. Fatima's domestic space threatens to suffocate her, and her only way out is to succumb to madness.
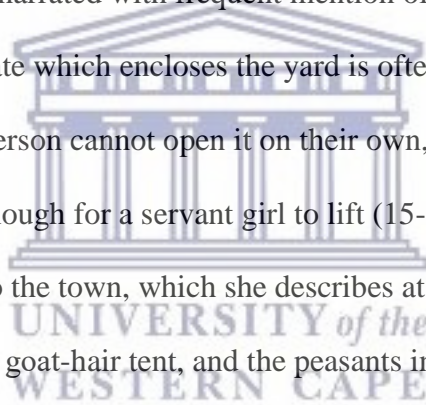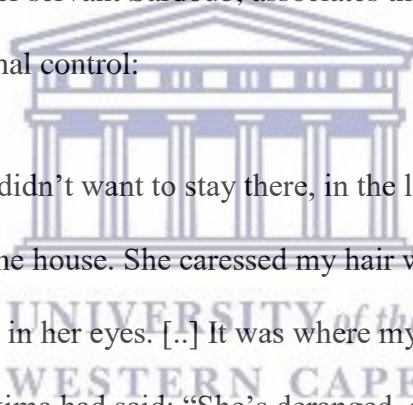
One of the main causes – if not the primary cause – of Fatima's experience of the home as suffocating is the rule of Grandmother Hakima as the patriarch. As discussed in the previous chapter, Grandmother Hakima visits the home frequently to ensure that various standards are adhered to, including patriarchal norms. She frequently admonishes Sardoub and Safiya – Fatima's servant and sister, respectively – for the younger girls' behaviour. The fact that she does not want Fatima to have access to the world beyond the walls is clearly demonstrated in the moment of Fatima's attempted escape. When the dog, Asaf, digs a hole under the perimeter wall, she tries to follow him through to the other side:

> I raced over to the hole and put my head inside. It was too narrow. I tried to put my legs through, but I couldn't. I dug at the earth with my fingernails and contorted my feet, but all I got were scratches on my legs and Safiya's screaming in my ears. "By God, I'll tell her . . . she'll know how to deal with you." I stuck my tongue out at her and ran off. I climbed up the tree again and looked out over the wall. The slave was leading her horse, and the two lads were pulling the donkey. (23)

Fatima's feverish attempt to follow the dog is an instinctual response that demonstrates the importance of freedom to any living creature. The scratches she sustains foreshadow her mental and physical decline as a result of these unhealthy circumstances. In the absence of their parents, Safiya as the eldest child is held responsible for Fatima's conformance to patriarchal norms. Although Safiya loves Fatima and worries about her, she remains strict because she knows they will be punished by Grandmother Hakima, who has patriarchal control over the home. When Safiya says, "she'll know how to deal with you", she is referring to Grandmother Hakima, who is the ominous "her" that Fatima sees arriving by horse. Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal authority therefore maintains Fatima's domestic

space as an enclosure, and this authority is largely facilitated by this same domestic space. The fact that Fatima's father is nomadic but his family is stationary casts him in the role of an occasional visitor rather than a reigning patriarch. The spatial arrangement of consistent distance between the patriarch and his household allows for a proxy to emerge in Grandmother Hakima, who is cruel and dismissive, and much more focused on maintaining patriarchal order than Fatima's father is.

Fatima's experience of her home as a prison is exacerbated when her father remarries after her mother's death. A young woman now, she is moved to the lemon room, which is the room her mother was moved to shortly before her final miscarriage and eventual death. Fatima, in conversation with her servant Sardoub, associates the room with madness and rejection as a result of patriarchal control:

I told her that I didn't want to stay there, in the lemon room, and that I could no longer stand the house. She caressed my hair with the palms of her hands, and tears welled in her eyes. [..] It was where my mother had bled and died. Grandmother Hakima had said: "She's deranged, always miscarrying her sons. She shouldn't be living with Muslims, that woman. She's demented. My heart bleeds for you, my son, living with the insane, and you remain patient." (60)

Placing Fatima in the room in which her mother died marks her as a similarly transgressive and disappointing woman when measured against Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal standards. The fact that Fatima's mother miscarried her sons made her not only inadequate but also insane in Grandmother Hakima's paradigm. Fatima can no longer "stand the house" because it no longer represents only her entrapment: her father has remarried and

his new wife has moved in, so Fatima now feels unwanted and exiled from the space in which she is trapped. The lemon room therefore represents not only a new level of entrapment, as she is confined within a specific room on the property, but also her exile from the position of a primary family member, and from acceptable femininity in Grandmother Hakima's view. Eventually, Fatima's space becomes so reduced that she only lives in her own mind. Thus, in *The Tent,* the domestic space is constructed as one of extreme entrapment by Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal rule.

The above analyses suggest that the patriarchal women in these texts exercise their authority over domestic space through control of the home's boundaries, ownership and interior mechanics. Iya Segi's absolute authority over Iya Femi and Iya Tope is exercised through her control over the home and its mechanics. Iya Segi and Iya Femi's attempts to exile Bolanle centre on their construction of the domestic space as one that is hostile to her by enforcing patriarchal standards of femininity. Iya Segi ensures Bolanle's loneliness by banishing her friends from the home on the basis that they are immoral, unmarried women. She also has Bolanle's comfortable armchair confiscated for failing to fall pregnant, and uses Bolanle's only safe space – her bedroom – to frame her as a witch bent on murdering her husband. Iya Segi's use of the home space to control and oppress Bolanle is entirely dependent on patriarchal constructions of femininity. This is mirrored in both Iya Segi and Iya Femi being denied access to stable, affirming and constructive domestic spaces as young women as a result of the actions of patriarchal women. In *Swallow,* Tolani is also denied ownership of her domestic space when she is alienated from her home through Rose's transformation once a man starts to pay her rent. This allows patriarchal power to penetrate their domestic space to the extent that Tolani's life is endangered when OC himself arrives to threaten her. Rose's decision to adopt OC's patriarchal agenda transforms her and Tolani's domestic space into a hostile one. Finally, in *The Tent,* domestic space is constructed as a

prison by Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal rule. This effect is exacerbated when Fatima is

expelled from the home itself and placed in the lemon room, where her mother – a symbol of

subversive femininity in Grandmother Hakima's view – had died. Grandmother Hakima's

patriarchal rule therefore constructed the patriarchal domestic space that oppressed Fatima to

such an extent that she became severely mentally ill.

Conclusion

In "Love's Metamorphosis in Third-Generation African Women's Writing: The

Example of Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*", Olusegun Adekoya

argues that "[t]hird-generation African female writing emphasises bonding as a strategy by

women to overcome the challenge of male tyranny" (354). On the basis of this, Adekoya

further contends that the kitchen is an emancipatory women's space that challenges

patriarchal rule. Similarly, Yunusy Castory Ng'umbi's argues in *Politics of the Family in*

Contemporary East and West African Women's Writing that third-generation East and West

African women writers create female characters that resist patriarchal rule by reimagining the

family structure with new gender roles (50). My primary disagreement with Adekoya is that I

argue that "male tyranny" can also infiltrate female homosocial spaces, where it produces

patriarchal women. I diverge with Ng'umbi on the matter that these renegotiated gender roles

necessarily have a positive impact on women's rights. The spatial manifestation of power

dynamics in *The Tent, Lyrics Alley, Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

suggests that patriarchal women characters can be produced by domestic and small places,

and can utilise these places – including the body – to oppress other women. This subverts the

popular conception of the home as a refuge and sanctuary, or the site of supportive women's

networks. Patriarchal women can transform the home into a hostile place that damages the

bodies within. Oppressive homosocial bonds, such as exist between Iya Segi and Bolanle,

Nabilah and Waheeba, Tolani and Rose after she meets OC, and Fatima and Grandmother

Hakima, can therefore lead to the oppression of women by other women on the basis of

established patriarchal systems. This takes place through the exploitation of the body-as-

home or the body in its porous connection to the home, such as when Iya Segi prohibits

Bolanle's use of the bright, beautiful crockery she adores, as it is a physical representation of

Bolanle's self, which cannot be externalised physically within Iya Segi's domain. Segi's

death – as a result of Iya Segi's use of the home space to oppress Bolanle – also suggests that

spatially executed patriarchy in domestic space can be fatal regardless of the gender of the

patriarch. This is also suggested by Rose's death as a result of the condom filled with cocaine

– here representing patriarchal control – penetrating and poisoning her body-as-home.

Waheeba's use of patriarchal logic to facilitate the involuntary genital excision on Ferial's

body in *Lyrics Alley* similarly demonstrates the violence of patriarchy executed in small

space, and the interconnectivity of the home with the body. This suggests that female

patriarchs can subject women to objectification and control by means of their bodies in ways

similar to those perpetuated by male patriarchs.
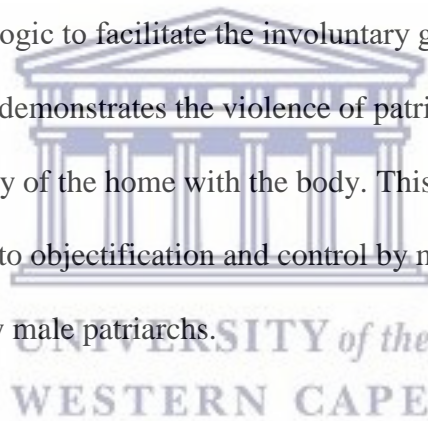
By controlling women's interactions with domestic space, patriarchal women oppress

and control other women by making homes unhomely to them. They establish boundaries and

rearrange the physical space in ways that disadvantage other women. In *The Secret Lives of*

Baba Segi's Wives, Iya Segi's patriarchal reign is established by her use of patriarchal power

to refuse Bolanle's crockery in the kitchen, banish Bolanle's friends, and remove Bolanle's

armchair. The climax of this pattern of oppression occurs when Iya Segi and Iya Femi

contaminate Bolanle's bedroom – her only relatively safe space – with evidence used to

accuse Bolanle of being a witch. As young women, Iya Segi and Iya Femi also suffer under

the rule of patriarchal women, who implement strict boundaries and rules for women's

behaviour. This indicates that women who are patriarchal oppressors in one context can be

victims in another – female patriarchy does not attach to one character but is spatially

produced in different contexts. Rose's patriarchal behaviour similarly concerns the

boundaries of the home space. When Rose allows OC a measure of control over her and

Tolani's domestic space through his payment of the rent, this initiates a chain of events that

culminates in OC threatening Tolani's life in her bedroom, thereby transforming her home

into a hostile space. Tolani has to return to her mother's home in the village to recover.

Hostile, bounded domestic space finds its most extreme instantiation in *The Tent,* which

offers a prison-like domestic setting, the boundaries of which are strictly controlled by

Grandmother Hakima's patriarchal rule. Fatima's world shrinks even further when she is

confined to the lemon room outside the house within a smaller set of walls. The association

of this room with the sour, acidic fruit clearly foreshadows Fatima's mental degeneration into

bitterness and hatred. Fatima is ultimately also trapped by her body and her inability to move

about effectively. These representations of domestic spaces used by patriarchal women to

oppress other women through the body's connection with the home and the construction of

unhomely homes offer an alternative view of domestic women's spaces that are written as

inherently affirmative or emancipatory. The patriarchal women examined here also

demonstrate that patriarchal rule is not contingent on gender, or even a specific character, but

is produced by the dynamics within a particular space, and is often spatially executed.
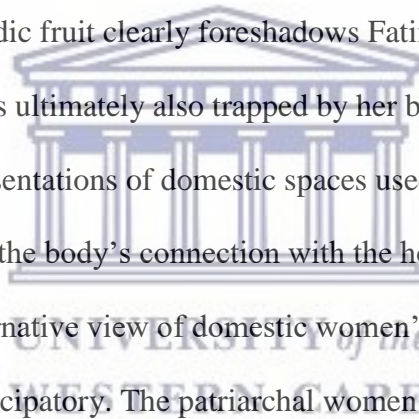
Conclusion

As we travel familiar roads or enter familiar buildings, the same stories, memories and emotions emerge. Through that preconscious choreography that David Seamon terms "place-ballets", we negotiate spaces that concretise the decisions of those in power. Divisions and hierarchies are embedded in small spaces – in walls, doors and the arrangements of bodies and objects. At spaces of larger scale, such divisions pervade in the design of cities, transport systems, national borders and global flows. African cities still bear witness to imperial dialogues and the spatial construction of power. In this thesis I have analysed the lived spatial experiences of women in *Lyrics Alley, The Tent, The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Lives* and *Swallow* to demonstrate the spatial operation of patriarchy in homosocial contexts. The texts present women characters located in urban and rural settings in Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria, where they negotiate transnational, national, urban, rural, private-public and domestic spaces, and the body as space.

As discovered in the first chapter, **National Femininities: Egypt, Nigeria and Sudan Writ Small,** national space penetrates the lives of the women in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* through their interactions with a range of smaller spaces. The patriarchal governmental power that constructs the national spaces of Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria permeates the cities, private-public spaces, domestic spaces and even "body spaces" of the women characters. In some cases, patriarchal women use this pervasive hierarchy to oppress other women in homosocial interactions. In other situations, specific spaces simply encourage patriarchal behaviour in women. An example of the latter occurs in *Swallow* when the main female characters face the aggressions of patriarchal state power at various interfaces in their day-to-day lives. Carolyne Dennis' analysis of the Nigerian government's War Against Indiscipline illuminates its inherent patriarchy, as the state targets women as primary sources of civil disorder. State

power in *Swallow* is shown to be particularly active at transport hubs, where it is mostly women, rather than men, who silence the protagonist's resistance to state aggression, thereby supporting the patriarchal system that controls the space. The protagonist's employment in an institution infiltrated by abusive state power also creates situations where she is oppressed by a female colleague, who uses patriarchal discourse to construct the protagonist as a transgressive woman who incites immoral behaviour. In these contexts, spaces saturated with state power engender patriarchal behaviour in women.

The discussions of national space also illuminate the way the transnational positioning of Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria respectively impact the characters' lives. Africa makes important contributions to global conversations, and the Global South and Global North are mutually constituted. However, the Global North continues to amass epistemological and economic power through transnational flows of capital, labour, media, knowledge and technology. Some Africans thus yearn to access the Global North, as it is a metonym for socio-economic progress. The female characters' smuggling narrative in *Swallow* suggests that women are willing to leverage patriarchal systems against other women if it grants them access to the Global North. In the Nigeria of *Swallow*, the characters are positioned at what Immanuel Wallerstein conceptualises as the periphery of the global flow of socioeconomic power, therefore they are too impoverished to travel to the place that the media presents as a locus of relief. In Arjun Appadurai's terms, this is a disjuncture between the financescape and the mediascape in Nigeria: the media raises the spectre of the Global North as a solution to the characters' socioeconomic distress, but the flow of capital does not reach them. These big-space dynamics give impetus to the women characters' involvement in the patriarchal endeavour that requires of them to present their bodies as objects – vehicles for smuggling. The female patriarch in *Swallow* thus enables national patriarchy to penetrate small space primarily through the female body.

In *Lyrics Alley,* female patriarchs are similarly produced by national space. The Egyptian wife considers herself superior to Sudanese women in socioeconomic terms. She objectifies her co-wife by fixating on what she considers to be the unattractive Sudanese traits of her body. Therefore, although it is her hatred of Sudanese big space that drives her need to disadvantage Sudanese women, she executes this by means of a patriarchal discourse that constitutes women as objects of male pleasure in small spaces. The Egyptian wife also utilises patriarchal nationhood to prevent the Sudanese wife from travelling to London with her son. As R. Radhakrishnan argues, nationhood is often constructed as female and insular in its inward component – the locus of culture and tradition – but as masculine in terms of its outward construction, to which is tethered associations of socioeconomic relationships, progress and safety. The Egyptian wife supports her husband in his argument that the Sudanese wife is too unsophisticated to travel to London, and thereby participates in constructing her co-wife as a patriarchal national archetype of womanhood: the locus of tradition and culture that should be restricted to the home space, in terms of Radhakrishnan's gendered analysis of nationalism. The Sudanese wife exacts her revenge on her co-wife through utilising Sudanese patriarchal nationhood to her own ends – she performs a genital excision on her co-wife's daughter. She exploits her proximity to her co-wife's home and makes use of her role as the representative of Sudanese tradition to enforce national patriarchal custom upon the body of the young "Egyptian" girl. The actions of the co-wives in *Lyrics Alley*, as well as the female character who recruits women as narcotics smugglers in *Swallow*, thus demonstrate that patriarchy does not attach to a particular gender or character. Women can be patriarchs, and those who are victims of patriarchy can therefore also be its perpetrators, a trend exacerbated by spatial dynamics of power and powerlessness. This is further suggested by the fact that the young, modern wife acts as a patriarchal woman who oppresses a traditional woman in *Lyrics Alley,* whereas the inverse is the case both in a

different situation in *Lyrics Alley,* as well as in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* – patriarchal femininity is characteristic of neither progressive nor conservative women, but is spatially produced. The women's actions in *Lyrics Alley* and *Swallow* also suggest that national patriarchy can penetrate and be executed at the level of small spaces such as the home or body. In the second chapter, similar patterns emerge regarding the execution of urban or rural patriarchy at the level of smaller spaces and the body.

The key thematic exploration of the second chapter, titled **Reading Patriarchal Femininities in City and Rural Spaces**, is how patriarchal urban contexts create competition for resources among women. As Bill Freund and Garth Myers argue, most African cities are still shaped by their colonial structures that were designed to expel the poor and disenfranchised to the outskirts of the city. Major cities serve as seats of governmental authority and catalysts of change, and thereby also draw people from across the country. The chaos caused by the collision of these forces contributes to what Chris Dunton identifies as urban entropic force. When this is considered through the lens of gender dynamics, it is clear that in these patriarchal contexts women are affected by urban entropy more than men are. City spaces thus encourage patriarchal behaviour in women, as they are already disadvantaged and therefore find one another easier to compete with than men. The texts show that such women will also execute patriarchal behaviour using space as a tool for oppression. Key to women's survival in patriarchal space is mobility, as this allows them to cross to the centre of city or town space from their position at the periphery. Mobility is therefore the primary lens through which patriarchal urban and rural spaces are studied as subsets of national and transnational space.

From Wole Soyinka's characterisation of Ogun, the masculine Yoruba god of the road, and arguments by Tim Cresswell, Doreen Massey and Alexandra Ganser, I have

outlined mobility as a gendered concept. Whereas mobility is a matter of adventure, fortune-seeking and wanderlust for men, women travel out of economic necessity. However, as Massey and Crowley remind us, mobility is not inherently positive; it could also be forced on someone rather than grant them agency. As mentioned, the protagonist in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is moved to the home of her rapist against her will as a result of her lack of independent mobility. The women characters in *Swallow* gain access to transport with great difficulty in order to move from their position at the periphery of the city to the centre, where they can earn a living. This pressured access to mobility is subtle but relentless, and causes women to undermine one another. The protagonist's mother in her rural setting, on the other hand, does have her access to mobility directly leveraged as a tool for her oppression by a patriarchal woman who argues that the use of the motorcycle is an insult to the family. The character loses her mobility as well as the socioeconomic benefits thereof. The patriarchal woman character in *The Tent* similarly controls women by preventing their mobility; they are unable to travel beyond the boundaries of the home. The female patriarch enforces the belief that only men – and herself as a patriarch by proxy – are sufficiently hardy in character to traverse big space. The patriarch by proxy in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is also the only woman with independent transport in a patriarchal home. The other wives are transported by their husband's driver – much like they are objects – and can take public transport with permission if they obey their husband's curfew. The female patriarch uses her access to independent transport to support her economic endeavours. This enables her to strengthen her position as patriarch in the home – her ability to traverse big space therefore gives her an advantage over the other women and facilitates her oppression of them. The most mobile women in these texts use patriarchal means to maintain their positions of power, including their access to travel. Whereas the protagonist's assault in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* demonstrates that patriarchal space can render women immobile in ways that

remove their agency, the female patriarch's behaviour shows that mobility can also encourage the proclivities of patriarchal women by enabling them to amass more power, especially when the other women are immobile due to the patriarchal context. The texts thus suggest that big spaces such as the city and rural spaces are penetrated by national patriarchy and, in conjunction with entropic force, can construct women as patriarchal by making them compete with one another for resources and mobility.

In **Private-Public Places and the Construction of Femininities**, I examined the operation of patriarchal femininity in private-public spaces. As demonstrated in Jürgen Habermas' definition of the public sphere, private-public spaces like coffee shops facilitated the development of the public sphere. This suggests that where space is concerned, the division between private and public is more nuanced. Robert Tally adds further complexity to this spatial division with his iteration of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory. On a global scale, Wallerstein conceptualises semiperipheral space as the space between the centre and periphery. Tally applies this at a national scale. Where the city forms the centre, suburban areas can function as the semiperiphery and the rural as the periphery. I further adapt this to an even smaller scale to apply within urban and rural contexts, to study how women traverse big spaces from their positions at the periphery to the centres of their own towns or villages. In terms of this paradigm, the semiperiphery is not comprised of suburban space, but of private-public spaces. This is further supported by Homi Bhabha's conception of community, since community spaces – like Habermas' public sphere – exist as intermediate spaces between state power and the individual, and allow for public discourse in privately owned places. These theoretical foundations enable me to define private-public spaces as public spaces in which private sphere activities are conducted. Furthermore, domestic spaces in which paid work is performed can also be considered as private-public space. However, unlike Habermas' public sphere places or Bhabha's community spaces, the private-public

spaces I examine do not resist or balance state power, but instead perpetuate patriarchal state power. In the texts at hand, this leads to the spatial construction of patriarchal women in private-public places, and their use of such places in their exploitation of other women. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the protagonist attends a private-public space when she visits the ultrasound centre, which acts as a Foucauldian locus of spatial hierarchisation of citizens. Despite the importance placed on reproduction, the state marginalises women as sources of indiscipline, and does not provide adequate resources for their needs. The hospital space is uncomfortable and carceral. Within this space, the protagonist is further marginalised due to her supposed inability to reproduce. She perceives the other women as objects designed for reproduction, noting the specificities of their reproductive organs in grotesque detail. The space encourages women to consider one another through a patriarchal lens – as bodies or objects that serve a specific, patriarchal purpose. This perspective thus makes it easier for women to compete with one another for those resources in the hospital managed by the patriarchal government.
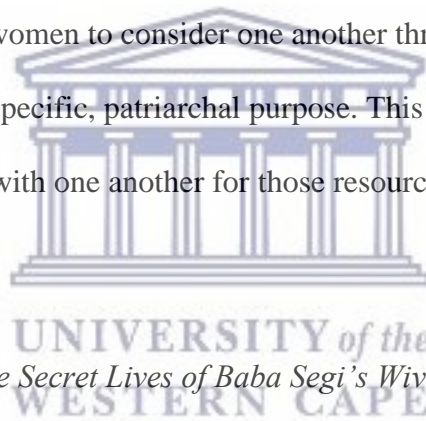
Like the hospital in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the hair salon in *Swallow* also functions as a private-public space that constructs patriarchal femininities. Within this space, women are defined by their outward appearance. By policing one another's bodies according to this patriarchal system of value, these women are constructed as patriarchal by the private-public space that is the salon. Their use of the body as the site of this oppression further suggests that the mechanism of their patriarchal behaviour is also spatial, as they utilise the body-as-space as a tool for oppression. A similar system of objectification is at play in the home in which a female character is employed as a domestic worker in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* The house is arranged to place her in a servile position under the stairs – a space within the home most often associated with the British servant class – with no possessions and even no bed. Her access to the home as well as the privacy of her body is

treated as a tool for her employer to use in her oppression as a domestic worker. Although there is also class-based oppression here, the female employer executes this oppression using patriarchal tropes: the treatment of women as subhuman, servile objects that perform domestic labour.

Finally, in *The Tent,* the protagonist's imaginary desert world also serves as a private-public space that she constructs to access space beyond the boundaries of her carceral home. Considering that the female patriarch maintains these boundaries through patriarchal control, the protagonist's construction of her private, imaginary public space is a form of escape. With the aid of Bertrand Westphal's and Dustin Crowley's iterations of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of smooth and striated space, it can be argued that the protagonist's access to the smooth desert space can be considered spatial transgression against the striated space of her home under her grandmother's patriarchal rule. However, according to Elliott Colla, the desert has associations of vulnerability and exposure in the Arab imaginary. In the protagonist's narrative, her increased interactions with her imaginary world lead to her neglect of her physical body. Her resulting disability impairs her mobility even further, and her consistent vulnerability in the desert space contributes to her eventual descent into madness. The female patriarch ultimately defeats the protagonist's attempts to escape to her private-public world. These texts thus suggest that, contrary to Bhabha's and Habermas' conceptions of private-public sites of resistance, these private-public spaces construct patriarchal women, and also serve as tools to be utilised in the oppression of women.

In the fourth chapter, **Body and Brick: Patriarchs by Proxy in Domestic Places,** the potential for domestic spaces to produce patriarchal women, and operate as tools for their use, is explored. The work of Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, and Jane Khatib-Chahidi reveal the ways private and domestic spaces vary

according to geocultural context. Domestic spaces are situated in different larger contexts, which affect how spatial divisions operate. For example, in Arab-Islamic contexts, rooms within the home can be defined as public spaces for a period of time due to the presence of non-kin males. In *Lyrics Alley*, *The Tent*, *Swallow* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* patriarchal women utilise the bodies of the occupants of domestic space as well as the division of space and the establishment of boundaries to facilitate the spatial oppression of other women within the home. Through the work of James Krasner, Charles Taylor and Julia Kristeva I theorise the body as an extension of the home through its porous connections with the environment. I also establish the body as the inner, most primal home of the self – a more private microcosm of the domestic space within which it is situated. Upon this foundation I then examine how patriarchal women use the body as space to oppress other women. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the female patriarch is established through the representation of the husband's body as weak and feminine in its porousness and vulnerability to the world. As the patriarch by proxy, the first wife uses the bodies of the other women in the home to control them. By refusing the protagonist's favourite crockery in the home, the female patriarch prevents the protagonist from externalising her personality beyond the boundaries of her body and into the shared domestic space. The patriarch by proxy also attempts to harm the protagonist's body when she tries to poison her. When the female patriarch's daughter consumes the poison, suffering reverberates throughout the home and affects all the characters in bodily ways. The porousness of the daughter's body that rendered her vulnerable to the female patriarch's spatial rule also results in the daughter's suffering reflecting back into the home and through the other bodies within.

In *Swallow,* the patriarchal female character's spatial patriarchy is also exercised through the body. However, in this case the adoption of a patriarchal agenda causes physical damage to her own body – despite her attempts to expose other women's bodies to the same

risks. This is a direct result of her turning her body into a smuggling vessel for a man's economic endeavour, through the patriarchal discourse of treating women as servile objects. The phallic condom as metonym of patriarchal control penetrates the private space of her female body and turns it against her – resulting in her death. In *Lyrics Alley,* the Sudanese wife commits a similar act of violence in her use of patriarchal discourse to oppress her co-wife. As they occupy separate wings of the same domestic space, she is able to exploit their physical proximity to exact her revenge on the body of her co-wife's daughter. As discussed in the first chapter, the Sudanese wife perpetuates the patriarchal practice of female genital excision on the daughter's body with the sole purpose of causing her co-wife distress. Through these narratives the texts suggest that patriarchal women characters utilise the body-as-space as a tool in their patriarchal oppression of the women around them, with violent and at times tragic results. This suggests that the objectification and control of women through their bodies is not a patriarchal practice exclusive to men but can also be characteristic of female patriarchs.
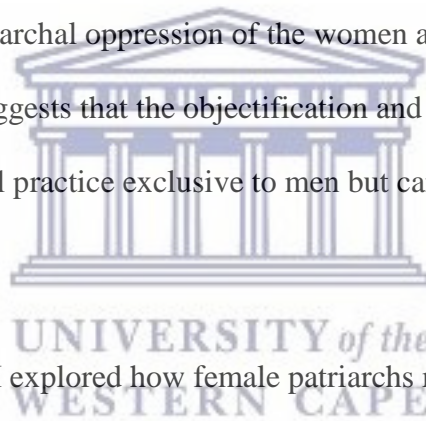
In the second section, I explored how female patriarchs maintain boundaries to render domestic spaces unhomely to other women. In some cases, these boundaries contribute to the production of patriarchal femininity, whereas in other cases such boundaries are used by patriarchal women to enforce their rule. By rendering homes unhomely to women, female patriarchs subvert the conception of domestic spaces as sanctuary or refuge where women can find support from other women. An example is Obioma Nnaemeka's argument that polygamy can be useful to co-wives who can support one another, as well as Olusegun Adekoya's assertion that women's spaces create supportive networks and enact resistance to patriarchy. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives,* the female patriarch expels the protagonist's friends from the house by arguing that unmarried women will corrupt the girls in the home. The female patriarch therefore actively prevents the protagonist from

constructing the domestic space as a supportive homosocial space that could help her to resist patriarchy. The female patriarch further utilises space in her oppression of the protagonist by denying her a comfortable chair in the living room on the basis of her alleged infertility, and plants evidence in the protagonist's bedroom to accuse her of witchcraft. The protagonist's sanctuary is therefore used to construct her as dangerous to patriarchy, since witchcraft is an ultimate threat to the gender hierarchy. Interestingly, the female patriarch experienced similar oppression in her youth. Her mother prevented her from realising her dream of building her own home both by expressly forbidding that she, as a woman, shame the men of the town by flaunting her economic success, and gifted her daughter's riches to her future husband. This suggests again that patriarchal behaviour is not necessarily inherent to a particular character, but is constructed by the spaces that characters occupy. The female patriarch in *The Tent* similarly controls the other female characters through the boundaries of the home. As the patriarch by proxy, she is the only female character to move freely beyond the property walls. She uses her patriarchal perspective of women as worthless and immodest to justify the incarceration of the other women within the domestic environment. The text suggests this primarily through the female patriarch's dialogue and through the protagonist's descriptions of the domestic space as carceral, her feverish attempts to escape its bounds, and her eventual exile to the lemon room, the space reserved for women who are inadequate by patriarchal standards. The protagonist's body also finally degenerates due to the injuries she sustains when she attempts to look beyond the walls and find more space. As discussed in the third chapter, the female patriarch also prohibits the protagonist from accessing her imaginary desert space that she created to escape the boundaries of the home. This indicates that the home can be constructed as a carceral space for women by female patriarchs.

In summary, my findings intimate that women's homosocial spaces are not inherently resistant to patriarchy but can both create and be leveraged as tools by patriarchal women in

their oppression of other women. This contradicts studies such as those of Olesegun Adekoya, Sorcha Gunne, Obioma Nnaemeka, Laura Dubek, Francoise Lionnet and Yunusy Castory Ng'umbi that suggest that women's homosocial relationships, renegotiation of gender roles, and women's spaces in domestic and city space can resist patriarchy through the construction of supportive environments for women. My study thus contributes to a body of scholarship that approaches women's homosocial interactions critically to examine the impact of the spaces within which they are situated, with particular focus on demonstrating the importance of space in the construction of characters, narrative and power. I am also contributing to the developing corpus of interdisciplinary literary study of the spatial production and execution of power, particularly with my novel focus on homosocial spaces and questions of gender hierarchy. Although the study of big space in culture is already developed by theorists like Homi Bhabha and Achille Mbembe, and by established scholars of African literature such as Elleke Boehmer, Dustin Crowley and Sarah Nuttall, the study of smaller African literary spaces has been taken up by only a few scholars, among them Grace Musila and Christopher Okonkwo. As this thesis is centred on African literary spaces in a range of geocultural contexts, I am therefore also able to contribute to the development of nuanced understandings of these spaces, particularly the establishment of spatial divisions in small spaces, and the nuanced reading of private-public space. Furthermore, I demonstrate the potential of studying female complicity in the maintenance of patriarchal systems with the hope that this will aid in more critical approaches to the study of literary women's spaces. Patriarchal power is not consistently wielded by a particular character or gender, but is produced anew within different spaces. These findings create opportunities for further study of female patriarchs in areas not related to their spatial production and operation. I would also be very interested to discover precisely what the conditions are under which truly emancipatory women's spaces are produced in literature – how the patriarchal context is

effectively excluded by the space. My hope is that this study of literary spaces will also aid in the development of similarly critical approaches to women's spaces in the material world. By exposing the oppressive realities of patriarchal women's spaces in fiction, I also contribute to the refinement of our ability to imagine and develop legitimately emancipatory women's spaces that are guarded against penetration by female patriarchs.

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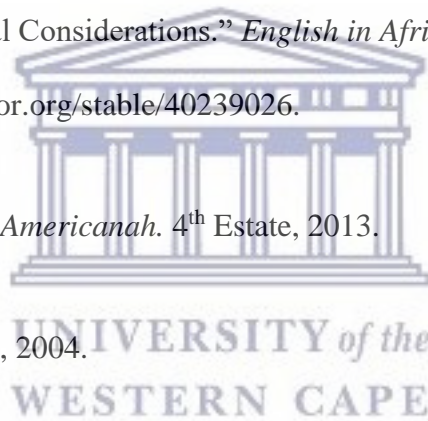
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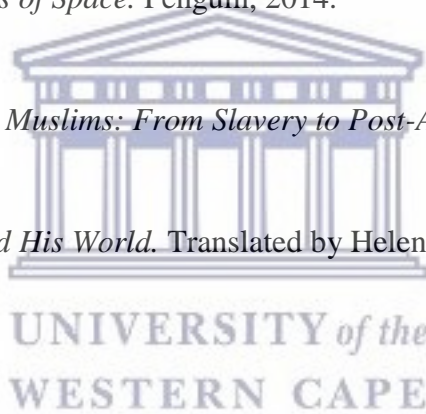
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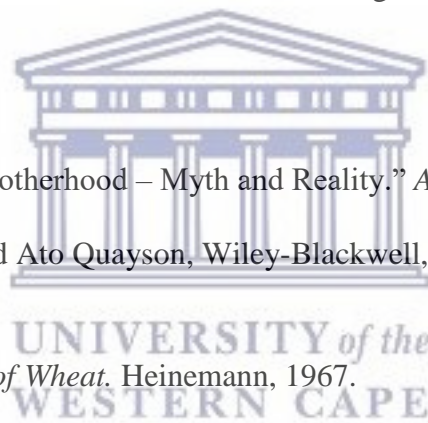
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