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**Migrant Fictions: theorising the writing and reading of
Nigerian stories by expatriate authors and publics.**

Andrew Murray Smith.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the
department of Sociology, University of Glasgow.

August, 2001.

Acknowledgements

Bourdieu is absolutely right, no piece of cultural work, including this thesis, is ever the product of an individual's solitary labour. I am happy to accept responsibility for any mistakes and misconstrued positions that may be found in this dissertation. But I have been increasingly aware of the fact that the production of it, in every sense, is indebted to a huge group of people, many of whom I can't thank individually here. Many of whom, in fact, I don't even know. All the same, there are some names that deserve naming.

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Abstract

This thesis is about the inter-relationship between migrancy and narrative. It is based on research carried out among expatriate Nigerians, studying the stories that they told of their time abroad and of their relationship with Nigeria. It is also based on research examining the cross-cultural reception of two contrasting novels in various parts of Scotland, and in Plateau State, Nigeria. The thesis argues that western cultural theory from the 1980s onwards has tended to celebrate migrancy in general, and the migrant intellectual specifically, in a way that privileges homelessness over residence, and in a fashion which allocates an undue voluntaristic power of achievement to acts of imagination, ignoring the delimiting effects of class position and economics on individual subjects. This aggrandisement of the migrant, it is argued, is part of a long-standing western romantic tradition in which the outsider is seen to hold a unique, vatic perspective on social life. While there is some sociological truth in such a proposition, the research presented here demonstrates how such a dominant intellectual attitude exerts a pressure *against* the production of fiction written locally in Africa, for African readers. It also demonstrates how the privileging of the distanced perspective can give the cue for migrancy to become, in itself, a form of symbolic capital held over and against the sedentary local. In both of these cases what appear to be purely cultural effects – changes in perspective and attitude – are at the same time disguised expressions of an economic privilege. The contribution of this dissertation then, is to examine these cultural questions from a materialist position and to suggest how it has come about that even in its discussion of migrancy, the deterritorialization of identity, and the death of the nation, western cultural theory has managed to re-enforce its own hegemonic and institutional grip.

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Introduction.

More than anything else, this is a thesis about distance. It does not take a great deal of preliminary reading to appreciate the degree to which the phenomenon of migration has become a major preoccupation for contemporary social theory and cultural criticism. On the one hand, especially within literary studies, migrant producers of art and literature are now centrally important, not only because their works are key objects of analysis, but also because they are, in their own right, often definitive contributors to debates over cultural resilience, the meeting of traditions, the narrating of memory and other related questions. Notwithstanding the fact that many of the emblematic names of the modernist movement wrote from and about exile, it is the powerful and arguably rejuvenating presence in the Western cultural market of writers with origins or ties in the ex-colonial nations that has made migrancy such a overwhelming motif in current literary debates.

Beyond culture in this more restricted sense, within the broad fields of social science and within a kind of amorphous, interdisciplinary ‘theory’, it is commonplace for interventions to begin by pointing out the qualitatively new levels of human movement within countries and across the world as a whole. From this stem a wide variety of discussions, focusing especially on the effect of these migrations on ideas of the public sphere, on nations and their imaginaries, and on the vexed question of identity. This latter term in particular has become part of the provenance of that body of writing given the name ‘postcolonial’ theory and, although I hope that what follows will demonstrate a willingness to engage broadly with various critical positions, it is this field that is primarily approached below. Postcolonial theory, as a name, may well seem an unwarranted generalisation, and a cursory scan through any one of the many introductory readers available does raise questions about exactly what are the

lineaments that define this critical sub-field. Many of the essays collected in such volumes are devoted directly or tangentially to this puzzle of definition itself. Nevertheless, the term does have a titular use in academic courses and conferences and as the selling point of those collections referred to above, and so I have employed it as if it were unproblematic in this thesis. It is, nevertheless, a particular version of postcolonial studies that it is my primary point of engagement and this deserves some initial explanation.

Identity is, as suggested, a fraught and rather overbearing contemporary critical issue. It would be hard to imagine Raymond Williams, for example, writing a new edition of *Keywords* in 2001 without including a section on a term so idiomatic to the language of departments in the humanities and social sciences. If he were to do so, he would be required to point out the rather complex etymology of the word, and the confusing fact that its origins can be discerned in two Latin terms: *identitas*, indicating the sameness or continuity of a thing, but perhaps also *identidem*, which refers, with an apparent contradiction, to the repetition or reassertion of a quality or nature. Usefully, this abbreviated history also provides us with a thumbnail sketch for the poststructural critique of the human subject whose argument, similarly, is that that which asserts itself *as a thing in itself* achieves its unitary image only as a discursive effect. In other words, only by an assumption of historical sameness whose very reiteration undermines its statement of continuity. On a closer inspection, the critic will disclose lines of internal division, dissimilarity and even outright conflict within this supposed sameness as well as tactics of ‘othering’ which help produce the illusion of coherence even as they reveal its impossibility. In the case of the individual this disclosure might be made courtesy of a post-Freudian analysis of consciousness, but in the context of the nation and its narratives it is a culturalist or discourse focussed

branch of postcolonial theory that has sought to reveal the repressed fractures in (primarily Western) conceptual orders.

In this, migration is often put forward as both the catalyst for the project and, paradoxically, a key piece of prosecuting evidence. The migrant is held to reveal, in the case of our national 'bodies', the limits that will afflict any project of cultural imagination. They do this because their presence forces two linked revelations: firstly, of the similarities that problematise our ideas of difference (e.g. the migrant practices and habits - culinary, spectacular, artistic etc. - that become part of British culture). Secondly, and conversely, of the differences that mark the fail-point of the liberal democratic idea of complete similarity (e.g. the way in which the hope of full assimilation has its bluff called by the continued attachment of migrants to prior or distant cultures). This dual exposure is staged individually for the migrant as subject. Where this subject is an artist or writer, their written or painted work can be adduced as critical evidence of this different sameness. In short, migration generally and the migrant subject specifically, are read to reveal a phenomenon of distance. The distance of us from ourselves, the distance of a culture from its own self-image.

In the work that follows I try, from a position of broad sympathy with the historical materialist tradition, on the one hand, and from the disciplinary perspective of sociology on the other, to engage productively with deconstructive postcolonial criticism and its discussion of migrancy and migrant cultural expression. Crucially I have sought to plan and conduct social research as the foil - both the putting to work *and* confounding - of theory. I will give a short delineation of this research in a moment, but before I do so, a statement of what constitutes my central contention.

As I have said, the question is one of distance. In the context of migration this obviously means many things: the expatriate's sense of exile, the cultural gap that

exists between the producer of an African novel and his or her European reader, or the feeling of a diminishing space between people in modernity's (arguably) contracted globe. Distance can also be experienced as a loss, or as the physical fact that makes movement impossible. There might well be, for example, a disjunction between the expectation of migration and its often estranging reality. More directly, the physical distance that exists between one part of the world and another, which cannot be wished away, stands as the condition of many people's rootedness. For some this is productive of a welcome stability, and for others it is the frustration of a hope. In much of what follows I argue against the critical aggrandisement of the work of the imagination. My scepticism is based on a recognition of the fact that no imaginative act is capable, itself, of producing the conditions of its own fulfilment. Distance, in this most direct and physical sense (the space that needs to be crossed in any act of travel and thereby the question of the means by which this is achieved) is the most insistent and irrefutable reminder of the fact that the imaginary has no means to bypass the material. We might question, in this respect, the value of theories referred to below which seek to foreground the work of the imagination *in migrancy* at just such a time as Europe is increasing the physical protection of its borders with armed guards, patrol boats, sniffer-dogs and razor-wire fencing.

Distance in all these forms is discussed either centrally or peripherally in the chapters that make up this work. The kernel, however, of my argument and of the research I have conducted in relation to it, is that idea of distance which I have linked, above, to the deconstructive brand of postcolonial studies. To put this very simply, and in way that will be at least complicated by subsequent material: the migrant in some aspects of postcolonial theory since its inauguration in the Western academy (arguably by Said with the publication of *Orientalism*) has been repeatedly associated

with a kind of reflexive position in relation to identity, to national formations and to cultural truth. In a word, they are taken as the exposing agents of the provisionality of these constructions. The migrant artist or intellectual is particularly adopted in this sense. Indeed, an image of the migrant comes to stand as the very figuration of this distanced and sceptical position and it is this apparently inevitable association that I have tried to place on the line in this thesis, whether in the theoretical discussion that forms chapters one to three, or in chapter five which looks at the narratives of migrancy told by Nigerian expatriates in Glasgow, or in chapters six and seven which look at the reception of ‘migrant literature’.

The conjunction between the migrant and a poststructural feel for the lack of coherence and closure in the construction of our identities is clearly very important. We should remember also that this de-essentialising vision stood squarely *against* the essentialist vision of British immigrants propagated by the New Right. Nevertheless, I want to pose critical questions of the way in which this conjunction has come to be naturalised. I do so for at least two main reasons to which I give short adumbration at this point. One, and it is the work of Pierre Bourdieu in particular that has helped me make this recognition, is that this aggrandisement of the reflexive ‘distance’ that the migrant is supposed to represent is, in many pieces of cultural theory, a covert celebration of that theory’s own self-portrait. A distanced position vis-à-vis the sedentary world is the prime currency of those who possess high levels of cultural capital. Such a position of privilege is inevitably tied to a level of material comfort that enables an ironic or consciously aloof involvement with social ‘games’. In making central migrant experience therefore, high academic theory can celebrate, partially at least, a reflection of itself and its own perspective. This is tied to a second key point, and here my position is informed by voices sympathetic but critical to

postcolonial studies such as Timothy Brennan, Benita Parry, Aijaz Ahmad, and Arif Dirlik. Too often this assertion of distance, and therefore of a suspicious and aporetic engagement with the ideas by which people mobilise themselves, not only leaves unrecognised the comfortable conditions of its own possibility, but makes its claim to a position of truth in a way that is disabling for these struggles. In case we forget, the fight for nation and decolonisation as well as the nativist counter-narratives which tracked these efforts, had strength because they affirmed the very ‘rootedness’ that imperial discourse had denigrated. And for rootedness here, we might read ‘sunkenness’, the very lack of distance of which high academic theory is so fearful and against which it counterposes the ideal of distanciation. In this case, what we need to bring to light is the covert and unintended parallel of such a move with the dynamics of colonial discourse and its neocolonial extensions.

Although I am rather pre-empting myself in doing so, a short example may be useful here. Arjun Appadurai’s discussion of ‘patriotism and its futures’ (1996, 158-177), part of a central work in the postcolonial discussion of migrancy, argues precisely that there is this tragedy of manichean logic at play in the demands for nationhood among various global groups, exiles, diasporas and states in waiting. The historical trap, in Appadurai’s conception, is sprung by the fact that such movements have no other means to imagine their unity than through the template of nationalism and its patriotic ideals. This is the case, Appadurai argues, even though the insufficiency of this idea is revealed not only by all the processes of globalisation, but also by their own diasporic links and ways of living. In other words, they are caught within a language of territorial possession and an idea of territorial identity even while they themselves reveal the redundancy of such a discourse.

The incapacity of many deterritorialized groups to think their way out of the imaginary of the nation-state [...means that...] many

movements of emancipation and identity are forced, in their struggles against existing nation-states, to embrace the very imaginary they seek to escape. (166)

Appadurai's model is often very impressive and powerful. My point in citing this short section, however, is to show how the themes discussed above: migrancy, reflexive distance and the valorising of the critic's own position come together. It is very clear in this quotation that the 'failure' of these groups for Appadurai is the failure to have embraced the full bequest of their migrant status. That is to say, their failure to have discovered new, less grounded, less sunken modes of affiliation. This stubborn inability to find in migrancy the same sceptical approach to territorial narratives of identity for which it is mined by the critic is buttressed precisely by the persuasive rhetoric of distance, whereby the critical high ground is ceded, appropriately enough, to those who lay a claim to a more elevated perspective. Migration, apart from the evidential use to which it is put in the chapter from which this citation is drawn, is also the rhetorical mechanism, within this passage, by which Appadurai gives himself licence to determine what these diasporic movements are actually seeking, in the face of their own 'incapacity' to understand this.

Research.

This, in short, is where I begin, with an interrogation of the theme of migrancy in postcolonial and related criticism. This work constitutes the first three chapters of the thesis below and develops in full the arguments given summarily here. The main body of the thesis, however, is research based and reaches for ways in which to discuss, give an account of, and understand migrancy of various sorts from a position informed by the lineaments of this critique, and by Marxist and materialist theory in

general. I offer a brief ground-plan of these chapters below, but before doing so I offer an account of the research that has been undertaken.

The distance that is most obviously under discussion in this thesis is that which exists between Nigeria and Britain. Apart from the need for some form of focus in the work, migration between Nigeria and Britain was chosen as a case-study at the outset primarily because I grew up in Akwa-Ibom state, South East Nigeria as a child. It is not clear to me where, or to what extent, this piece of personal history has informed this work, but practically as well as emotionally it has kept questions of migrancy and distance, especially cultural distance, in my mind.

My practical research involved a number of projects. Firstly, a six week period in Nigeria, during which time I met local authors and academics, particularly with a view to getting a sense of the difficulties of publication and distribution that they face because of their refusal, or inability, to leave West Africa. Related to this, of course, are questions of how locality informs literary and cultural production. In extended individual discussion with writers, as well as at a number of authors' groups which I attended, these issues were prominent.

Furthermore, in Jos, Plateau State, I conducted research targeted at a broader constituency. This involved distributing numbers of blank questionnaires at points on the campus of Jos University, in the foyers of local guesthouses and in a public bar, where they were completed and returned. Some questionnaires were also dispersed and returned by contacts, although I tried to avoid this method of data-collection because of the replication of responses that can be associated with it. The questionnaire was modelled on the format of the interviews I conducted in Britain (see below) and dealt with respondents' attitudes to expatriate Nigerians, to their experience and expression of residence in Nigeria, to politics, history and to the

reading and appreciation of novel fiction. All in all, 52 questionnaires were completed and returned.

Further to this, two reading groups were established and run in Nigeria, as is further detailed in chapter seven. The first involved twelve younger participants and studied their reaction to *Things Fall Apart*, which they were given copies to read, but which was, for some of them at least, an already familiar text. Their responses were detailed in an extended group discussion which took place, and was taped, after they had read the book. A couple of further respondents who could not attend the meeting submitted written reactions. The discussion was loosely structured around a series of questions which related to the readings of the same novel put forward by Scottish readers. The second reading group that ran in Jos was largely comprised of older, more academic figures, and revolved around Iain Crichton Smith's *Consider the Lilies*. There were nine participants and, again, a couple of supplementary written submissions. This second group ran with the same format as that of the first, and again the discussion was structured loosely around questions that sought a comparative angle vis-à-vis the reception of Nigerian fiction within Nigeria in the first instance, and of British readers in the second.

Additionally, I ran an extended discussion with a large group of students, and a few members of the academic staff at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This session also focussed on *Things Fall Apart*, a text which a majority of participants had been using in their current course. While I initiated some of this session with direct questions, the responses and counter-responses often took on their own dynamic so that there was a large amount of debate and argument. This was also taped, the number of directly contributing participants was 37 but the number present in total was around 60.

The research conducted in Nigeria was intended to provide comparative and contrasting material to that gathered in the course of work carried out in Scotland, primarily in and around Glasgow. At its broadest this has meant coming to know and map out the contours of the Nigerian expatriate community in the city. The Nigerian born population of Glasgow is considerably smaller than that found in London, but is larger than might perhaps be appreciated. It includes a substantial number of long-term resident professionals, largely working in the medical, chemical production and academic areas, as well as small-business owners and some clerical employees. There is also a more transient student population, often in the UK for higher degrees including doctoral and postdoctoral work. The majority of these students are taking professional courses, 'hard' sciences and engineering. Those that are involved in subjects within the humanities are often taking theology or missiological courses.

There are a large number of different bodies providing networks of social interaction, support and a nexus for the memory of cultural practice for Nigerians in Glasgow, including branches of the Association of Nigerians Abroad, Igbo and Yoruba groups, student bodies that fluctuate with the current student populations, and at least one church that meets monthly on a rotational basis within private flats and houses. These are only the most institutionalised face of a variety of informal, sometimes discontinuous and partial links that exist between families and friends. There was a notable difference between those organisations that constituted themselves as specifically 'expatriate' bodies, and those which were constellations of individuals who considered themselves naturalised residents in the UK, such as British Igbos. Generally, the former tended to have a stronger focus on the retention of cultural practices associated with Nigeria and a more urgent sense of the on-going

politics of the home country. The latter groups, by contrast, had more utilitarian, practical intentions such as the provision of education and information.

Inevitably my involvement and participant observation tended to focus on groupings which were in some sense established or routine. Individual participants outside of these networks were primarily contacted through bureaucratic bodies such as University registrars although my inquiries included Muslim and Christian organisations, charitable groups dealing with asylum seekers, community forums and hubs of social interaction such as specialist food shops and cafes. An attempted questionnaire survey based on my list of contacts in Glasgow met with only limited success, and the bulk of my transcribed material in this respect comes from a series of extended interviews I carried out with Nigerians in the city and its immediately surrounding areas. The interviews were based around a series of questions which, as stated, also formed the basis for the later work in Jos. In this case an additional focus was placed on the experience of living abroad, as well as on the subjects' own definition of themselves in identitarian terms, on the negotiations required in cross-cultural meetings, and on motivations and intentions in travel. They also included a discussion of literature and of Nigerian fiction in particular. Although this framework of questions remained a consistent skeleton, the actual interviews were loosely controlled and moved with the interviewee's own prioritisation of response. They were taped and lasted between fifty and ninety minutes, usually around an hour. I conducted twenty-two of these interviews, including respondents from all of the various instituted groupings referred to above.

The final part of my research focussed on the response of Scottish readers to *Things Fall Apart*. The route of this material into my work is unusual, deriving as it does from my use of the text in a taught course over a period of two years, in seven

different locations. I make my defence of this anomalous type of research in chapter six, where the essays are primarily deployed. A total of thirty-nine responses to the book were gathered in this respect, many of them from readers with a working-class background. As comparison, therefore, I carried out an additional study of the responses to the book on the part of a reading group in a middle-class community. In this latter case, the format was as that adopted in *Jos*: a loose discussion with certain questions employed as a framework.

This forms the substance of the direct research which has fed into my thesis. Needless to say it has been bolstered and supplemented by less formal contacts and in particular by on-going correspondence with Nigerian authors, both aspiring and published, and by other inquiries, most notably involving publishers here and abroad, as well as communication with various Nigerian academics and friends, study of the Nigerian press and some work with official statistical databases, particularly those giving UK immigration figures. I have also studied the development of the Nigerian anglophone literary novel from Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) forwards. My work in this respect has included lesser-known contemporary pieces by authors distributed under the auspices of Nigerian publishing houses and the Nigerian branches of international publishers.

Ground-plan.

In the title of this thesis I use the term 'migrant fictions'. Read in various ways this phrase sutures together the chapters that make up this work. Firstly, as suggested, I use the term with a slightly sceptical tone - fiction with its more denigrating connotations intact - to imply my criticism of the use to which migrancy as a topic has

been put in some postcolonial cultural and discourse studies. This theoretical engagement, as has already been said, takes place most directly in the initial three chapters of the thesis and is the foundation for what follows. I have given a short account of my proposition above and it is unnecessary to rehearse it here. My stance at the outset is deliberately anti-culturalist. I am suspicious of what seems to me to be a very de-materialised account of discourse, and have tried to reject a focus on imagination, or the uses of identitarian narratives, which operates *to the exclusion* of questions of those material and economic forces that delimit and structure our lives. The disavowal of the filtering effects of institutional factors is a particular focus in chapter three. Having set out this position, however, I have tried to use an analysis of the material gathered in research to discuss this very link between migration and narrative. Throughout my research it was increasingly clear to me that the stories through which and in which people understand their lives, and their migrancy in this case, are undeniably important. My search in the chapters that follow this oppositional beginning, therefore, is for a way in which to discuss and give account of this from a materialist position. This means, in part, refusing to accept the apparently natural valency between ‘story’ and ‘migration’ as posited by recent theory, where this naturalisation operates to elide the economic and physical impingements on human movement. I recognise that there is something of a paradox in my taking as object of study the very conjunction of which I have been sceptical but this questioning engagement seems to me wholly in keeping with the idea of critique.

My work proceeds, then, in various ways. Chapter four considers *narratives of migrancy*. That is to say, I examine, in a series of linked textual readings, the use of the trope of migration in a number of recent Nigerian novels, situating this within a broader discussion of the thematic of alienation in the anglophone literary fictional

tradition of Nigeria. This chapter is intended to act as a form of pivot within the thesis. In suggesting at one point the way in which migration acts as a means of discursive ‘closure’ for some of these novels it ties back to a similar suggestion made in relation to the summoning of the migrant in Western criticism. On the other hand, in focussing on the making of narratives about migrancy it is proleptic to subsequent chapters. It also provides some sense of the position-takings within the field of Nigerian fiction which may be useful in giving a situational sense to the discussions of *Things Fall Apart* in chapters six and seven.

Chapter five moves sideways to look at the same question from a different perspective, that of the production of *narratives of their own migrancy* by expatriate Nigerians in Glasgow, and, to some extent, the reception or reading of these narratives by residents in Nigeria. Again, the chapter links to that which both precedes it and proceeds from it. In examining the idea of the ‘been-to’ as a form of symbolic capital, for example, the discussion relates to the link between distanced perspectives and the ownership of high levels of all forms of capital already referred to above. In reiterating the transparent importance of a sense of original locality to the interviewees it pre-empts issues raised in chapter seven and within the thesis generally, questioning whether ideas of identity can be said to have been conclusively de-linked from territory in the wake of expanding diasporic and expatriate populations.

Chapter six introduces the idea of *migrant narratives* in another, perhaps more conventional sense, examining the reception of a Nigerian novel among British readers. My return to Said in this context offers a supplementary angle on the question of the social work of the imagination, one which I seek to tie into a recognition of class and the social position from which readings are produced. The idea of

homologies of position which is introduced at the conclusion of the chapter pre-empt the similar answer given in the last chapter to the similar question of how readings are produced across cultural boundaries within Nigeria. This final chapter, the seventh, offers an important comparative discussion to that which goes before it, looking at the readings of *Things Fall Apart* among local Nigerian subjects. It then develops this by recognising the use to which knowledge of literature can be put in the service of distinction, a discussion related to that in chapter six. Finally, there is a return to comparative work, and a consideration of the reception of migrant fiction from its other side, that is to say, the encounter with a Scottish novel by readers in Nigeria.

This is a skeletal map of my thesis. It is the focus on migration, narrative and distance which provides the unifying thematic structure of the work as a whole. If there is a rhizomatic quality to what follows this reflects in part the fact that these topics themselves are discussed in such a diffuse and varied range of disciplinary contexts. Apart from postcolonial studies I have drawn at various points on discussions from a wide range of academic disciplines. Anthropological writing has been important in the development of this thesis, particularly in relation to the discussion of the liminal instituted by Van Gennep, and recent debates over the idea of centred, stable cultures as typified by Clifford's well known essay (1992). I have drawn also on literary criticism in its general sense and more specifically in relation to Nigerian fiction. This includes the famous confrontations between Soyinka and the Chinweizu troika and those occurring over the uses or otherwise of Europhone writing, a discussion that merges with oral literary studies, as exemplified in the African context by Finnegan and Okpewho. This work itself has acted as a form of bridge between the now slightly disreputable examination of 'traditional' African culture and the rise of a vibrant new field of African popular cultural studies in the

1980s. Here the emphasis has been on recognising the comfortably creole, incorporative forms of cultural production developed in non-elite urban settings and more recently theorists in this area have begun to focus on the constitutive role of the audience in the production of meaning. Beyond these broadly literary arenas, I have employed elements of migration studies. This includes the sociological examination of population flow, expatriate communities and the world system. It also implies, more recently, the central place occupied by migration in discussions of globalisation and 'global culture'. Social and political histories of Nigeria have obviously been vital reading, including, but certainly not exclusive to the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism and the increasing recognition of the long history of West Africans within Britain. More broadly again, the thesis is situated within the sociology of culture in general, and therefore includes discussion of Pierre Bourdieu and others, material which I believe usefully focuses on the production and reception of texts and social location of writers and readers. Within all these areas referenced above, I have used writing that might be termed feminist, including discussions over the term deterritorialization and its use in description of women's experience. Finally, again within all of these fields, I have used work by writers describing themselves as Marxist, including a body of criticism specifically levelled at postcolonial studies and a whole range of accounts that have mapped the shifting patterns of exploitation in what can still be validly described as a neocolonial world.

Methodology.

I have used this preliminary section to point out coherence within the thesis rather than dig trenches around it. Nevertheless, I want to conclude by offering a brief

analysis of some methodological questions, and a short statement on some of the terminology employed in what follows. The debates within the different theoretical arenas just referred to have obviously helped determine the form in which I have framed my accounts. Crucially, however, so have the results and experience of carrying out social research. I defend a basic position of sociology here: statements about society and about specific arenas of social life are, at the least, less likely to be simply fabrications if they derive from some attempt to examine those areas as they exist and are experienced 'off' the theoretical page. Actual social life problematises the neatness of sociological models of life. This does not mean, I believe, that we should forgo the attempt to understand social processes and situations. But it does imply a duty on the part of social theory to put its accounts on the line, at least as long as it conceives of itself as a search for explanation rather than normative prescription.

In the course of the thesis itself I have tried to acknowledge the limits placed on its conclusions by the nature of my research. For example, my analysis of the reception given to novels relates overwhelmingly to 'literary' anglophone fiction. Large areas of popular cultural production and its audiences, working in English, pidgin, and local languages, therefore lie outside of the main focus of this work. Secondly, my research among expatriate Nigerians was among subjects whose journeys to Britain were largely voluntary. This is a slightly ambiguous phrasing given that individuals can feel impelled in different ways, especially in the contexts of marriage and childhood. Nevertheless, I mean to point out here that my research did not include interviews with asylum seekers or, as far as I am aware, illegal immigrants. This is largely a reflection of the Nigerian population in Glasgow, or at least that section of it that I was able to contact and which was willing to participate in my research. This does not mean, of course, that the experiences of all those

interviewed were uniformly secure and comfortable, but it does mean generally that my discussion in chapter seven is not about the experience of directly enforced exile. There is also a contradictory gender bias in the material gathered. The majority of those Nigerians interviewed in Glasgow were male, those who were female were generally single, either as a result of the death of their husband, or because they had not yet married. Men were also over-represented in the questionnaire survey conducted in Jos (38 male, 19 female). In all of the reading groups that ran in Nigeria and in Britain, however, there were more female than male participants. The groups whose responses form the basis of chapter six had very significantly more female than male members.

These are some of the general lineaments of my research. For the most part, I have tended to present my discussion in a qualitative format, focussing in detail on the accounts of specific interviewees and respondents. In this respect I have drawn out individual statements and pieces of narration that seemed to exemplify a more general sensibility behind responses, or which offered a particularly unexpected or unguarded statement. I have also tried, at a number of points, to bring to the forefront moments where the typical structure of research practice breaks down, and the apparently disinterested nature of academic research is questioned. This relates to the single most important reflexive point that needs to be made in this introduction. As I have said, the central concern of this thesis is to question the apparently inevitable alliance of vision and distance in much cultural theory and the implication that distance is a condition of genuine knowledge. Inevitably, of course, my research is complicit in the very idea I am trying to critique. In all kinds of ways the authority of the academic address, and the position of the social researcher is constituted by an association with this distanced, 'objective' pose. This is a fact of which I have tried to be consistently

aware, and it is in this respect that I discuss in chapter six my gradual recognition that readings of a novel demonstrating no apparent 'critical distance' can still be impelled by real critical intent. Similarly, in chapter five, where I discuss the image of the 'been-to' as a form of symbolic capital, there is no intention of dissembling the fact that this research itself claims credence on the back of my own trip to Nigeria and therefore a parallel form of authorisation. It is in this respect that I think deconstructivist theory is genuinely useful and I take seriously Spivak's repeated warnings that academic work needs to recognise the material entanglements by which it can 'afford' its apparent objectivity. In short, there is no attempt to claim here that this thesis is in any sense immune to or elevated above the very critique which it tries to offer. Where I have attacked the 'fetishisation of the imaginary' and the reification of cultural work so that it appears somehow separate and unrelated to material questions these criticisms are implied reflexively to this thesis, this act of cultural work itself. The danger in reflexive thinking is, of course, that it can become circular and narcissistic. For this reason I make this recognition at the outset, but with the exception of a few further comments in the body of the thesis, I have not continually returned to it in what follows.

My final point here is a terminological one. I have repeatedly employed in my writing the kind of classificatory language of which contemporary 'post' theories are deeply suspicious. In particular I have made unqualified reference to class, but also in places to ethnic, gender and national labels of identity. Although I have also recognised some of the dangers of such labels in the contexts in which they are used, I have not adopted that reflexive dismantling of them which Western theory has come to assume as the first habit of good critical manners. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, and this relates to the above, many of those I interviewed, taped and had

discussion with in the course of my work were only too willing to accept and apply these terms. African writers and critics have often been among the most stubborn and robust defenders of such language in a way that has led to their being considered behind the game of Western academia. This terminology, however, is not just the product of an uncritical hankering after a stable sense of identity, but often a choice informed by a history of investment in a term and of its having been used – of its being put to current use – among valuable congregations of people. Secondly, I use the language of classification, most particularly the language of class, simply because I accept that it does have a basis in objective social positions within a structure of production (whether of material commodities or the acts of symbolic distinction), which embrace large numbers of human beings. Thirdly, and this relates very directly to the critique of distanced perspectives which follows, the language of class has always been, for the dominant social forces, the most threatening and undermining of the weapons in sociology's conceptual arsenal. A repetitive recognition of difference may be a solvent to repressive taxonomies, but this critical habit aids the forgetting of the fact that the converse is also true: the language of class dissolves that radical and insistent foregrounding of the isolated individual which is capitalism's primary operating condition. Here, as so often in this thesis, my point is courtesy of Bourdieu, and, in particular, the last sections of *Distinction* (1984 [1979]), which are returned to in the discussion below.

Chapter 1: The New Romantics

Part of the conclusion of the theoretical section of this thesis is that migrancy, rather than being seen as a phenomenon which exposes the contingency of our cultural practices in such a way as to foreground their arbitrary and free-standing nature, may also reveal something of the very opposite: that is to say, may make apparent the continuity of economic and material lines of division. That it may expose the degree to which certain boundaries of exclusion are the common inheritance of the market system which is installed in dominance world-wide. So, it is with a sense of prolepsis, a preview of something to follow, that I begin this preliminary section attempting to reveal another continuity more usually presented as its own opposite, as a new beginning.

The task of trying to map postcolonial theory as a coherent set of critical positions may be an act of hopeless cartography, but it would not be a particularly contentious opening statement to suggest that a common intention among many of the current writers in the field would have been, initially at least, an attempt to move beyond the attitudes and positions of an earlier critical constellation: that of commonwealth literary studies. What I suggest here is that it is possible to trace a continuity between certain positions apparent in commonwealth literary studies but which resurface in recent acts of postcolonial critique despite this theory's proclamation of newness.¹ Particularly, I would suggest, the continuity is strongest in those arenas of postcolonial criticism that might most deny its presence, in those writers whose work most overlaps with the variety of other post- theories: -

¹ Karin Barber makes the same argument for different but related reasons, pointing out that in its emphasis on Anglophone African literature, and in its reading of these as the 'others' of Eurocentric discourse, postcolonial criticism 'both continues and inverts the 'Commonwealth' criticism inaugurated in the 1960s' (1995, 3).

modernism, -structuralism, -essentialism. This line of continuity across recent Western-based theorising of non-Western cultural productions is designated with the term 'new romanticism'.

This is not simply analogy, and although its apparent neatness requires qualification there is a genuine correlation to be pointed out. The romantic re-envisaging of the interface between art and world shares a great deal with recent postcolonial conceptualisations of the same relationship. And it is in the figure of the migrant in general, and the migrant artist in particular, that the correspondence is made most apparent. But let us begin further back, with the reception of one of the first anglophone Nigerian novelists.²

Amos Tutuola and unspoiled utterance.

Particularly in the wake of critiques by African writers of the falsity of apparently universal critical criteria (Achebe, 1975; Nwoga 1976; Chinweizu and others, 1980; Abrahams, 1981) the early 'postcolonial' theorising on African fiction was often careful to define itself by an act of differentiation to these attitudes of the past. (e.g. Ashcroft and others, 1989, 126-7). Reviewing the reception of a writer like Amos Tutuola in the 1960's and 70's, however, it is notable that many critics of 'commonwealth literature', writing two decades after the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, are equally scrupulous in establishing the difference of their own responses from the mistaken receptions of their predecessors. Moore (1962), Laurence (1977 [1968]), Dathorne (1971), Larson (1972), Lindfors (1973) and Palmer (1979)

² 'Anglophone' being a necessary qualification here. Pita Nwana was published as early as 1933, Fagunwa in 1938. (Nwachakwu-Agbada, 1997, 124-134) The statement might also be complicated by taking into account the status of the writing from the market traditions on the one hand, and of Equiano and other early exiles on the other.

all preface their comments on Tutuola with the idea that he has been previously misrecognised either locally or abroad. Yet, looking more closely at the analyses which follow these acts of prefatory boundary marking, an equivocation comes into view.

Dathorne's essay, for example, begins by stating that Tutuola is neither 'the 'natural', teller of the fantastic account of an individual's nightmare' nor 'the syllogist, infringer of the copyright of folklore' (1971, 65). Rather his significance lies somewhere in between, so that the reasoning behind both his local rejection and foreign acceptance are equally mistaken. The truth, Dathorne asserts, is that Tutuola is a 'literary paradox.' However, despite overtly rejecting the idea that Tutuola is a 'natural', something of that same image reasserts itself under a different name. We are told that Tutuola is 'unique', and that this uniqueness derives in the first place from the degree to which his use of folklore is 'intrinsic' - something the educated African can have no hope of replicating (66) - and secondly from his prodigious ability in the conscious and 'imaginative re-ordering of folklore' (72). Tutuola's gift, it seems, is one of internal imaginative synthesis: 'in him the paradoxes of culture are evened out' (70). Larson's chapter on Tutuola replicates the vacillation. Equally rejecting the idea that he is somehow 'the only original African talent, uninfluenced by the West' (1972, 94), Larson is still able to borrow the following quote from André Breton in description:

"The dictation of thought, *in the absence of all control by reason*, excluding any aesthetic or moral preoccupation." Except for the last comment about the "moral preoccupation", this definition characterizes Tutuola's writing quite patly. (95, my italics)

The difference, of course, is that, in contrast to Breton's conscious experimentation, this surrealism is 'indigenous and even spontaneous' (95). Larson too makes notable reference to Tutuola's 'never-flagging imagination' (94) and its ability to reshape

discrepant cultural materials into some form of unity. There is no need to labour the point here, what becomes clear in the re-reading of these critical pieces on Tutuola is that, while studiously avoiding the term ‘natural genius’, precisely such an image makes a covert return in theories of his unique ‘intrinsic-ness’ and his imaginative talent of synthesis.

One of the most impressive things about him when he is at his best is the vitality of his writing and *the completely unstudied and casual way* in which he makes his dramatic effects [...] it is always *the real thing*. (Laurence, 1977, 121, my italics)

Or, as Moore says in his comparison with Camara Laye: ‘Laye is, of course, a highly sophisticated and very literary writer; all his effects are calculated, while very few of Tutuola’s are.’ (1962, 42)

Two hundred years after the flowering of what Abrams called ‘expressive’ theories of art, Tutuola is being described in terms that certainly evoke the romantic conception of the poet, and even more specifically, the ‘natural’ or ‘primitive’ utterance which Wordsworth, superficially at least, seems to take as his model in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*.

[D]ominated by sense and imagination, not by reason, their first mode of thought was passionate, animistic, particularistic and mythical, rather than rational and abstract. (Abrams, 1953, 80)

Vico’s conception of primal man as given in précis here by Abrams, shares a great deal with Laurence’s conception of Tutuola cited above. It is not wholly clear what she means by ‘the real thing’, but what is resonant is some implication of authenticity, of that same ‘intrinsic’ quality to which Larson and Dathorne refer. Wordsworth drew on the same idea of authenticity when he talked about employing ‘the real language of men’.³ (1979 [1805], 18) We are certainly not far, at this point, from the idealised

³ Coleridge, it will be remembered, takes exception to Wordsworth’s lack of specificity in the term: ‘I object,’ he says, referring to Wordsworth’s manifesto, ‘to the equivocation in the use of the word

image of the poet who, 'because he is 'a Force of Nature', writes as he must' (Abrams, 1953, 26). This is the first aspect of what I am describing as 'new romanticism.'

Moore is not alone in rejecting the idea that Tutuola is a genuine novelist, although he does it with a little more grace than Palmer, who says: 'To attempt to make a serious evaluation of Tutuola as a novelist is to apply to his works a body of assumptions to which they are incapable of rising' (1979, 12). Whatever questions *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and subsequent Tutuolan works may raise over the constitution of the novel as a form, Moore's analysis of the author as 'a unique genius' and 'a visionary' (1962, 39 and 42) seems to move beyond such merely literary debate to reclaim for Tutuola a mythic role: the poet vates, the seer. Perhaps it is this supposedly visionary quality, the idea that Tutuola's voice is 'like some oracle in the heyday of oracles' (Collins, 1977, 123) which accounts for the equivocation over whether his work is justifiably considered a novel.⁴ Romanticism, as Wordsworth in his defence of versification demonstrates, has always tended to privilege the poetic over the prosaic utterance. The responses of these critics to Tutuola's early work is not uniform, but rather, are muddled and often contradictory. The key statements of English romantic theory are no less so.⁵ What I want to draw

'real'. Every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his facilities and the depth and quickness of his feelings.' (1971 [1817], 198)

⁴ As recently as 1999, critical work on Tutuola was still compelled to make this point: 'By no stretch of the imagination can *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* be considered a novel in the classical sense.' (Tobias, 1999, 69)

⁵ Of course, the romantic movement was never a monolithic thing, and in treating two of the exemplary texts below, it is important to remember that there were also other aspects of romantic thought. Shelley typifies some of the ambivalences here, his *A Defence of Poetry* [1840] suggesting that imagination and poetry can only exist within the weave of 'the fabric of human society' (in Brett-Smith (ed.), 40). At the same time, his metaphor often switches to that of the chain, in which the poet is the best, highest and most distanced link. Shelley's *Defence* might justify either the image of the isolated poet-prophet inspired by a gift of imagination, or the engaged poet whose social vision is what makes them 'the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (in Brett-Smith (ed.) 59). The Herderian aspect of romanticism, meanwhile, placed an emphasis precisely on the concepts of folk and homeland, and in this respect what Raymond Williams argues of modernism holds for romanticism: the respect for 'folk' or 'primitive' art discernible in both movements can lead in two

attention to here is the degree to which these two sets of critical interventions follow a similar template.

Coleridge, particularly in the second book of *Biographia Literaria*, sets about rejecting Wordsworth's 'cultural primitivism'⁶, the argument that genuine poetry lies as close as possible to 'a selection of language really used by men' (Wordsworth, 1979, 21), which is to say, the rural or plain man speaking under the influence of some over-riding passion. Again the suggestion is that true poetry has something of the transparent about it, the genuine, free of 'art' in its negative sense. Wordsworth's position, especially in its more democratic statements is already full of qualifications⁷ when Coleridge comes to it and in essence the latter's critique is simply an unravelling of the confusions already present in the *Preface*. Who, for example, Coleridge asks, makes this 'selection' of language and by what criteria? (1971, chapter XVII). Coleridge, however, has his own aporia. Rejecting the idea that true literary language is somehow natural - 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' - he falls back on the figure of Shakespeare to demonstrate the depth of deliberate thought that produces a work like *Venus and Adonis*. The author was, he says:

no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration [but] first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely until knowledge became habitual[.] (1971, 180)

And yet at the start of the same chapter Coleridge has re-inscribed the fact that the true poet is never simply a product of learning, of socialising, but a thing born, a fact of genius. Something of being, rather than becoming.

directions, either towards a specific engagement with local communities, or towards a chauvinist nationalism (Williams, 1989, 49-63).

⁶ Abrams uses the phrase in description of the debate: (1953, 120).

⁷ See, for example, the long series of qualifications with which Wordsworth encircles those statements whose abbreviated citations we are familiar with: e.g. the image of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (1979, 22) or as 'a man speaking to men' (30-1).

[T]he sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this, together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect [...] may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learnt. (1971, 176)

So, Coleridge's apparent rejection of Wordsworth's natural artist is really a substitution for his own archetype of the same figure.

It is immediately apparent how close this runs to the reception of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Dathorne, for example, insists that Tutuola is a 'conscious craftsman', (1971, 72) in deliberate contradistinction to those previous critics who saw his art as simple theft from Yoruba oral storytelling. At the same time, he falls back on something finally beyond analysis - the fact that Tutuola's work has an 'intrinsic' quality - to explain its success. So far, so much like Coleridge. Even more striking is the degree to which this unquantifiable aspect of Tutuola's writing is displaced onto his acts of imaginative synthesis. Poetic ability, to Coleridge, is a gift of imagination, and imagination at least in its secondary aspect is a power of aggregation, an access to that gestalt quality that he so equated to artistic beauty. Almost all the receptions of Tutuola in the sixties and seventies, faced with a hesitation over the idea of the natural genius, revert to this same concept of imagination to still the uncertainty.

Taking his stories direct from his people's traditional lore, he uses his inexhaustible imagination and inventive power to embellish them, to add to them or alter them, and generally transform them[.] (Palmer, 1979, 13)

Having said this, Palmer goes on to detail Tutuola's incorporation of modern elements into his fictional milieu. Dathorne, meanwhile, praises the 'imaginative translation of mythology' (1971, 64) while Larson talks about his 'never-flagging imagination' and its filtering effect (1972, 94). My point, in short, is that commonwealth literary criticism, so called, was entangled with many of the same dilemmas as romantic theory, couched broadly in the same terms and figured specifically in the image of the

writer. For all that the critics above are careful to avoid a deliberate expression of belief in the 'natural genius' it is exposed in their reliance on theories of 'imagination' which, as with Coleridge, are never wholly expanded upon precisely because to do so would involve an explicit return to the idea of artistic ability as a boon or gift.

The exposure is made again in the reception of Tutuola's later works. The uniformity of expression is striking:

After the spectacular success of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola's work shows a distinct falling off in power. (Palmer, 1979, 28)

After *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, there is a falling off in Tutuola's work. (Dathorne, 1971, 73)

That the critical consensus should be that Tutuola will never reach the heights of his first work expresses more clearly than anything else the degree to which the quality respected in the author's writing is not, despite references to conscious craft, anything wholly deliberate. Rather that Tutuola's work was, as Lindfors⁸ had it, that of a 'literary freak' (1973, 142), an example of the genuine, the excavated treasure, the untouched, unsullied utterance. In this respect Moore makes overt what is simply suggestion in the later essays when he writes:

It is fascinating to speculate whether Tutuola, given a formal education instead of a few years at primary school, would have developed into a writer of Camara Laye's type. Would his precious gift of confidence have evaporated in the long process of learning? And could his intensely private imaginative life, so essentially that of a man who has been 'left alone', have survived the academic rat-race? (1962, 42)

The image of the artist as the one wholly disassociated from the social, alone and by correlation unspoiled, is, as Raymond Williams points out (1958, chapter 2), an incomplete idea to attribute to the original romantics. Perhaps much more it is with the later Victorian inheritors of the tradition such as Arnold that the nostalgia for an

⁸ To be clear at this point, Lindfors uses this term in an act of mimicking the voice of other critics, the project in his essay on Tutuola is somewhat different in that he insists - against all statements of

isolated realm of the poetic is triggered. Certainly Arnold it is who provides the apotheosis of the 'poet's painful but necessary isolation, in his creativity,' (Abrams, 1953, 281) and does so in the figure of the scholar gypsy. Placed next to the comment from Moore offered above, it becomes clear that this brand of criticism does conceive of Tutuola as some kind of substitute scholar gypsy .

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly! / For strong the infection of
our mental strife, / Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest.⁹

Just so, the artist at the periphery of the social world, resident in some 'other' grouping and blessed in this exile with access to a truth beyond the tawdry grasp of modernity. This is precisely the image Moore projects onto Tutuola, even down to the extraordinary description of him as a man 'left alone'. There is, as far as I can find, no bibliographic information to justify the idea of Tutuola as any kind of recluse. 'Left alone' therefore, must mean untouched by modern life, a pristine artist in the same sense that Arnold forewarns his mythic wanderer to remain in rural isolation. These are the beginnings of the aggrandisement of the migrant artist in the western reception of African literature. There is a branch of postcolonial theory, it will be argued, that draws heavily on these roots.

Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is weighted with an anxiety about the condition of cultural production in a rising modernity, and specifically, with a hesitancy about the act of communication between the artist and his audience. His concluding remarks offer clarifications to specific poems and return to his apprehension that 'my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary

Tutuola's uniqueness - that he is an African writer. To put the quote in context: 'He may be a literary freak but he must be recognized as a thoroughly African one.'

⁹ It is worth citing the larger context of the passage as it demonstrates the correlation of attitude well: 'But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly! / For strong the infection of our mental strife, / Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest; / And we should win thee for thy own fair life, / Like us distracted, and like us unblest. / Soon, soon thy cheer would die, / Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfixed thy powers, / And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made; / And then thy glad perennial youth would fade, / Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.'

connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself.' (1979, 44) Faced with the fact that the transmission of meaning has become problematic, Wordsworth finally re-affirms the self sufficiency of the artist's own critical judgement. To forfeit such he says, would be to risk the poetic mind losing all confidence in itself, to be debilitated. There is then, in his desire to make a return to the 'real', an inverted expression of artistic alienation. He quietens this uncertainty by insisting on the special vision and judgement of the artist. Coleridge grapples with the same sense of alienation and like Wordsworth, if with more conviction, he argues the unique nature of the literary gift. There is a definite inversion here: a sense of the increasing difficulty of modern cultural communication is made the very condition of the artist. The romantics, to invert Spivak's dictum, unlearned their loss as a privilege.

None of this can be disconnected from the rise of the capitalist market, and of the sale of cultural artefacts within that market. When Wordsworth talks despairingly about poetry being placed on the same level as 'Frontinac, or sherry' (1979, 32-3) his disgust is aimed at the degradation of art to the status of mere commodity. Later, in Mill, we find the fact made clearer:

A poet may write poetry with the intention of publishing it; he may even write for the express purpose of being paid for it; that it should *be* poetry, being written under any such influences, is far less probable[.] (1976 [1833], 12-3)

The sense of severance from audience that promotes the rise of romantic theory is directly related to the circumstances of producing art for anonymous commodity sale.

As Williams comments:

To set art as a priori above any market, in an ideal sphere of its own, was as regular a response to the new difficulties [of artistic survival] as their frank empirical recognition. (Williams, 1989, 165)

Much of this is played out in Shelley's defence of poetry, in which he fights to combine a sense of the poet's specific historical contemporaneity with a reassertion of the eternal Platonic realm of art, above and beyond the encroaching rule of utilitarian reason and economic calculation. Shelley's elevation of poetry, it must be remembered, is part of a response to his friend Thomas Love Peacock's satirical attack, which pointedly picks out the ambivalent position of art in the rising market.¹⁰ We return to this in substantially more detail in a subsequent chapter, but I foreground it here because it is crucial to recognise that for much that has changed between the eighteenth century Lake district and twentieth century Lagos, there is much that is also continuous.

Taking Mill's statement in context we can see how this process of re-learning loss as privilege is undertaken. It is improbable that poetry can be produced in conditions of wage-labour he says, not because the intervention of the commodity circuit makes the communication between artist and audience implausible, but rather the very opposite, that poetry itself is a purely private action, that it 'is of the nature of soliloquy.' (12) Effect becomes cause: the isolation of a cultural realm becomes its own justification. These processes by which the necessities of a separate social field are produced *as its logic* have been much more fully analysed by Bourdieu, but we will find something of the same pattern continually re-emerging in postcolonial theory's treatment of the migrant artist. Here also a strategic, even life preserving, action - exile - is made the very condition of art. At this point it becomes clear that this indefinable quality of Tutuola's, his ability to write 'authentically', is seen as

¹⁰ '[P]oetry [...] like all other trades, takes its rise in the demand for the commodity, and flourishes in proportion to the extent of the market.' (in Brett-Smith (ed.) 4) As stated, Shelley's arguments in response shift between, and indeed try to reconcile, an assertion of specific historical work with a defensive reclaiming of the Platonic sphere of art: '[A] poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty.' (in Brett-Smith (ed.) 32) At the same time, he is seeking to

positive precisely because it is about art being true to what has become its self-defining creed: its autonomy as a realm of meaning. Hence it is no surprise to hear Dathorne praise the fact that Tutuola has managed to remove the ‘presentation of attitudes from the sociological level on which Chinua Achebe presents them[.]’ (1971, 64) Beneath the talk of authenticity then - that ‘respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism’ as Salman Rushdie (1991, 67) calls it - is the installation of Tutuola as a touchstone figure for ‘transcendent literature’ (Onoge, 1974, 53), the adopted archetype for an image of art as its own world. Writing with the nature of soliloquy indeed. That this is wholly a mis-reading of Tutuola is left to Achebe to point out when he discusses the degree to which his predecessor’s work is, more than anything else, a parable on consumption and thus hugely relevant to the sociology of contemporary Nigeria (Achebe, 1988, 68-76).¹¹

So we return at this point to our original conjunction and in particular to the figure of the scholar gypsy. The early literary critical treatment of Tutuola reveals a jealous respect for the utterances of a ‘life unlike to ours.’¹² Postcolonial theory rejects this ‘cultural primitivism’, just as Coleridge rejected that of Wordsworth. Where it remains entangled with the ‘new romanticism’, however, is in its continued privileging of the cultural over the economic, the reduction of the political to performance, and at base, an uncertainty about the act of communication itself. The provenance of the postcolonial remains very much that which strikes such a nervous note in Wordsworth’s *Preface*: the emergence of an apparently new space between

respond to Peacock’s equally telling thrust, that the romantics had concluded that ‘all that is artificial is anti-poetical. Society is artificial, therefore we will live out of society.’ (14)

¹¹ It is interesting, in the context of the genealogy of this ‘new romanticism’ to note that a recent postcolonial reading of Tutuola’s own predecessor, D.O. Fagunwa, returns to the idea that the Yoruba author’s work - here contrasted to that of Ngugi - is somehow different in terms of the ‘immanence’ of the conflicts it plays out. (George, 1997, 78-98). See chapter two for further discussion.

¹² I quote, by way of parallel, the section from Glanvil that Arnold footnotes to *The Scholar Gypsy*: ‘[T]he people he went with were not such impostors as they were taken for, but [...] they had a traditional kind of learning among them, and could do wonders by the power of the imagination’.

author and audience. We are presented in writing from Africa and so forth, according to Ashcroft et al, with a 'phenomenon of *distance*: with writers and readers far more 'absent' from each other than they would be if located in the same culture' (1989, 186, my italics). Just as romantic theory could not shake off the nervous sense of culture's alienation, so that Arnold is still attempting the same inversion of artistic loss-as-privilege in the Victorian period, postcolonial theorising returns to this anxious territory and its new revelations in a neocolonial world. If it refutes, on the one hand, the patronising, primitivist attitudes of some commonwealth literary critical writing, it is only too willing, on the other, to valorise that other half of Arnold's idealistic scholar gypsy: the artist as migrant. The change may appear as a break between the irreconcilable positions of essentialism and constructivism, the born artist and the voluntaristic subject, but by focussing on the re-emergent figure of the migrant artist we can recognise how a cultured distanciation from the mundane world is foregrounded in *both* frames. It is in this particularly that we can see the continuities between the 'new romanticism' and its previous incarnations.

Bhabha's avenging migrants and the re-valuing of homelessness.

[M]odern man has suffered from a deepening condition of 'homelessness'. The correlate of this migratory character of his experience of society and of self has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of 'home'. It goes without saying that this condition is psychologically hard to bear. It has therefore engendered its own nostalgias - nostalgias, that is, for a condition of 'being at home' in society, with oneself and, ultimately, in the universe. (Berger, 1973, 77)

So say Berger and his co-authors as part of their exposition of humankind's loss of psychological placement in the face of modernity's anonymous bureaucratic structures and the sudden plurality of meaningful 'life-worlds'. Three decades later

and such an analysis sounds outdated not so much because of its statement as because of its tone. 'Homelessness', at least in this metaphorical sense, is embraced as a positive distancing from old certainties. 'The beyond', in Homi Bhabha's words - that which denies any easy closure for our subjective conceptual worlds - is 'the trope of our times.' (1994, 1) And in Bhabha, as in much postcolonial theory, the tone of melancholy that pervades work such as Berger's, is notable only by its absence. When Bhabha talks about a liminality haunting any attempt at imagining the social, the revelation even in the most strident discursive statement of identity, indeed *particularly* in our most strident statements of identity, that there is 'no necessary or eternal belongingness' (179) this is no longer a traumatic fact. Rather it is to be welcomed because such unsettling is the potential, if ambiguous, way out of that conundrum which is the focus of his work: how to conceive of community in such a way that we do not disavow difference and without sliding into a liberal pluralism which presupposes some transcendental subject as guarantor of equality. Bhabha's hybridity should not be misread as a renovated version of synthesis, a resolution of difference within the boundaries of a specific totality. As Young argues (1990, 1-20), the deconstructivist project is poised precisely against appropriative Western epistemologies of this sort, against those supposed universalisms that Achebe and others had critiqued long before the 'postcolonial' emerged as an academic fashion. Bhabha's 'third space' is definitively not Hegel's third term. (Bhabha, 1994, 113) His discussion of hybridity, in fact, refers to something nearly the opposite: the recognition that subject-creation can never be a closed act. One of his early examples is the unease of the colonial agent faced with those he has sought to create in his own image, and yet who, seeing them as nearly the same but not quite, finds his narcissistic gaze unnerved. The necessary Other is revealed as neither wholly

different, nor identical. In such ambiguous moments are exposed the degrees to which the performance of identity is always constituted 'from the edges'.¹³

Cultures come to be represented by virtue of the processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are vicariously addressed to - *through* - an Other. This erases any essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures[.] (Bhabha, 1994, 59)

There are problems with Bhabha's work which have been variously pointed out (Moore-Gilbert, 1997a, chapter 4; Young, 1990, chapter 8). By seeking to reconstitute 'politics as a performativity' (Bhabha, 1994, 15) and by coupling this to the idea that all discursive address, all statements of identity are riddled with anxiety, Bhabha simply underplays the degree to which the confidence of power is usually premised in material if not martial dominance, something Said has argued in interview.¹⁴ Equally the possibility of resistance seems to be wholly uncertain as there is no stable collectivity around which it might congregate. In fact, although Bhabha talks about the missing 'third dimension' in post-structural discourses of identity - that is to say, a sense of continuity, of the historical inheritance of struggle (45-52) - the very fact that 'Hybridity has no [...] perspective of depth or truth to provide' (113) leaves to resistance only the secondary and responsive strategy of playing on the ambiguities in the authoritative address. The resisting subject, furthermore, is riven by their own false closures. There are indeed points in Bhabha's work where it is unclear whether there is any conscious possibility of resisting power, or whether resistance takes on

¹³ Bhabha's discussion is not ahistorical, he is detailing the actual ambiguities of the colonial address and of the rhetorical strategies that colonialism was required to adopt. Nevertheless, we might compare the work of the Nigerian historian O.U. Kalu (1985), for example, who has given an account of cultural policy in colonial Nigeria which, like Bhabha, recognises the ambiguities of the colonial formation, its destructiveness, but also its instinct towards preservation of the 'exotic'. There is a marked difference however, in that Kalu places at the centre of his account deliberate, conscious resistance on the part of the colonised and the effects this had on colonial administration. The question of such self-aware acts of political agency is at best an enigmatic one in Bhabha.

¹⁴ '[T]hese facts are to me unassailable: you know that if you are a white man in the South or in the Tropics or in the East, that is a very powerful thing. There is no way of saying that you are overcome with fear or suspicion and all the rest of it or that you are anxious - you know, Homi Bhabha's elaborations of that just don't speak to me.' (Said, 1998, 84)

the meaning it has in electronics, a friction called forth by the circuit of power, a fact without conscious agency.

All of this is relevant, but what I really want to point out here is the degree to which the metaphor of homelessness is revalued. That which is a representative of modern trauma for Berger, or of the universalised nature of alienation for Mészáros (1970, 130-140) has become in Bhabha something to be welcomed.¹⁵ If there is a way in which community can be grounded in neither false pluralism nor divisive opposition, it is in that moment of the enunciation of identity in which we become common citizens of the 'third space.' Beyond ordinary narratives, he argues, in the meeting of differences 'there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of self in a world of travel, the re-settlement of the borderline community of migration.' (Bhabha, 1994, 9) So it is that the migrant, particularly the migrant intellectual or artist, becomes a synecdochal figure, the precursor of our new common homelessness, the one whose existence reveals the fragility of all projected identities. As in Berger, a metaphorical condition of homelessness becomes universal, except in this sense a universal exposure of the constructedness of cultural boundaries. Yet paradoxically, at the same time, the migrant becomes a figure of the degree to which the 'other' can never be wholly appropriated.

As Eagleton has pointed out, certain preliminary warnings have become traditional in postcolonial theorising, often so that they can be subsequently ignored. (1998, 24-26) The one which reads, 'of course, migration is for many a far from metaphorical condition' is another that might be added to his imaginary manual for

¹⁵ Disussing this usage of the metaphor of homelessness, Peter van der Veer makes the valuable point: 'What I find striking about these statements is that they seem to invoke the traditional *romantic* trope of the 'self-made individual' who invents himself in the marginality of the American frontier.' (1997, 95, italics added).

aspiring critics. Dennis Walder makes just such a qualification before going on to demonstrate this process of the universalisation of homelessness:

[I]deas of cross-fertilization, of the potential richness of traffic between and across boundaries - racial, national and international - can return postcolonial theorizing to a more celebratory, even [...] liberatory mode[.] (1998, 81)

Which is made clearer in the conclusion: ‘All of us, in some sense, belong to the diaspora; every nation is hybrid, becoming more so as migration increases[.]’ (199) Walder’s position however, is a simplification of the kind of argument that Bhabha is making in as much as the latter specifically distances himself from the idea that incorporative hybridity is a valuable possibility.¹⁶ As argued, Bhabha’s point is more subtle and involves the suggestion that cultural difference might not be reintegrated in a new unity, but instead, will expose the degree to which the meaningfulness of identity is always displaced, constructed in the negative mirrors of discursively created others, hence identity is a continually fragile, unfinished project. It is in this more complex form that homelessness is revalued by Bhabha as a means in which humanity might move beyond the exclusive grands récits of Western history:

The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization - the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where *adding to does not add up* but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification. (Bhabha, 1994, 162, my italics)

The migrant enters his text as the figure of the contingency of identity, as the one who ‘articulates the death-in life of the idea of the “imagined community” (164). In a peculiar sense it is precisely their non-hybrid nature that makes them exemplars of

¹⁶ The appropriative nature of such a move and the degree to which it would benefit the cultural agenda of globally penetrative capital, has already been well critiqued by Ahmad (1995), Dirlík (1994) and others.

this new hybridity, makes them the expression of nationally and communally repressed lines of difference.

The migrant culture of the in-between, [...] dramatizes the activity of culture's *untranslatability*; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream, or the racist's nightmare, of a "full transmission of subject-matter"; and towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference. (224 - my italics)

Yet there is a strange slippage here, because the migrant in Bhabha becomes at least a triple figure: synecdoche for our common crisis of identity, catalyst for that crisis and also, in themselves, a figure privileged with a gift of extra sight. If it is 'by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity' (170), then it is the migrant who has been there before us, who is our path-setter.

The pluralistic structures of modern society have made the life of more and more individuals migratory, ever-changing, mobile [...] the anomic threat of these constellations is very powerful indeed. (Berger, 1973, 165)

In Bhabha's reconsidered homelessness, however, mobility equates to vision not anomie. Not as an over-arching panoramic sight of the whole, of course, but a flickering between the multiple frames of identity, an awareness of the provisionality of truths. An exposure of the discursive means by which Truth is constituted and capitalised. Here the figure of the migrant converges with the idea that identity is not a matter of shared experience, of common position within a structure or system, of mutual history or any of the other supposed fallacies of foundationalism. That it is, rather, a merely discursive creation, an act of enunciation, of iteration. Spivak powerfully argues that this need not be read as a reduction of the material world to language (e.g. 1990, 1-16), but there is a facet of postcolonial theory in which the question of 'who we are' has shrunk to the question of who we say we are, of who

others say we are, and of the discourses in which all this is announced and played out. The fact that Bhabha uses the term 'colonial subject' for figures on both sides of the colonial division of power demonstrates well the degree to which he sees them as equally constituted by their participation in the same discourse. Rosemary Marangoly George argues something similar for the subsequent history of the postcolonial:

Acknowledging a common history of colonialism implicates both margins and center in the future course of this history. Under this revised rubric of postcolonialism one could genuinely be confused about which location (the one-time coloniser or the one-time colonised) takes on the center and which the margin in the arena of cultural politics. (1996, 9)

This can only be the case if it is forgotten that the texts of cultural politics require material means of production as well as places of publication, networks of delivery and a panoply of other concrete institutions, and that these are not equally accessible on a global scale. It is the elision of these base facts of cultural production that allows the relegation of colonial relationships to a comfortable past.¹⁷

Although there are many differences, there is a continuity between the cultural retreat from materiality suggested in one strand of romanticism and that which is effected here. The deterritorialising of culture and the deterritorialised human converge just as they do in the scholar-gypsy. Migrancy is, as it was with Arnold, the promethean price for vision, even if in the postcolonial context this vision is a peculiar kind of blindness.

[T]hose of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us. [...] But whatever technical solutions we may find [those who] have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. (Rushdie, 1991, 12 and 19)

¹⁷ McLintock's well-known essay sounds an important warning against the way in which the preface 'post-' draws the contemporary sting from analyses of the colonial. "'Post-colonial' Latin America" she examples, 'has been invaded by the United States over 100 times this century alone.' (1994, 296)

Rushdie has been, in many ways, the adopted archetype in this debate. It is precisely the provisionality of truth to which his migrancy has exposed him which is made the new radicalism.

The postcolonial constellation of new romanticism involves as with the original romantics, a re-reading of the experience of distance from audience *as* benefit, as access to new vision. Hence the migrant, and in particular the migrant writer becomes a visionary figure. Alienation is the price paid to recognise the provisionality of cultural constructions. In place of the withdrawal from the mess and smear of the material world enacted by Victorian romanticism however, discourse focused theory makes the representational predominant over the real. ‘Everything’ as Spivak writes with some despair, ‘is being made “cultural”.’ (1999, 412) The migrant author and intellectual, like Arnold’s scholar-gypsy in his time, become figures for this broader re-conception, they become representative of our supposedly common groundlessness. Bhabha, as if to demonstrate the degree to which the imagined has usurped anything exterior to itself, takes as his example the created figure of Gibreel from Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*. Here, he says, is the ‘avenging migrant’ (1994, 169), exposing the way in which the category of nation is premised on silent, hybrid histories. But avenging who? Against who? We are faced with the bizarre scenario of a purely fictional character enacting a revenge against an already fractured and anxious power, on behalf of a collectivity or subject which is itself unstable and contradictory.

Homelessness and severance.

Much of this is well demonstrated in the seven page chapter with which Robert Young prefaces his account of the poststructuralist attack on Western, especially Marxist, historiography. In this brief act of critical bush-clearing¹⁸ Young uses, among other texts, Lukacs' pre-Marxist *The Theory of the Novel* as example of the desire to recover an apparently lost totality which, he argues, remains at the base of the Marxist narrative, and of its mistaken refutation of poststructuralism as a 'loss of history'. What Lukacs' text gives early indication of, he argues, is the emotional drive in Marxism's falsely unifying vision of history:

The objections to poststructuralism at one level represent merely the latest version of the Romantic nostalgia for this unfallen totality of being. (1990, 24)

It is noticeable then that this key text in the coming-into-constellation of postcolonial theory begins by opposing itself to a materialist account. Young's critique has much power, but it is worth returning for a moment to Lukacs' original because part of what the earlier writer is discussing is the relationship between the real and representational, and this is also very much the arena of our discussion. The dilemma for modern art, Lukacs had argued, is that it finds itself alienated from anything exterior to itself. That its forms lose correspondence to the world precisely because reality has no longer any formal coherence to offer for the mimetic gaze:

Art, the visionary reality of the world made to measure, has thus become *independent*: it is no longer a copy, for all the models have gone[.] (1978, 37, my italics)

In the context of this severance art can either seek to represent the impossibility of totalising structures, i.e. reproduce the fragmentation, or is left with an altogether

¹⁸ I borrow the term from Chinweizu et al who use it in description of the preliminary moves of critical debates. (1980, 32)

more difficult possibility, the ‘attempt to forget that art is only one sphere among many’ (38). That is to say, art projects are faced with the task of having to ‘produce out of themselves all that was once accepted as given’ (38) - both forms and the conditions for their effectiveness. Reading Lukacs describe this ‘exaggeration of the substantiality of art’ (38) it does feel that we are being presented, not so much with a precursor for a kind of Marxist nostalgia, as an early prediction of current theoretical fashions.

In the context of this, therefore, and the foregoing discussion of the elevation of the deterritorialized, it is hardly surprising to hear him say:

[T]he old parallelism of the transcendental structure of the form-giving subject and the world of created forms has been destroyed, and the *ultimate basis of artistic creation has become homelessness*. (40-1, my italics)

In just such a correlation, prefaced with just such an exaggeration of the ‘substantiality’ of the cultural, postcolonial criticism begins its elevation of the migrant writer. If it is acceptable for Young to use this pre-Marxist text to diagnose a Marxist nostalgia for unity, then I suggest that the romanticism it diagnoses is not so much that of Marxism as of ‘post’ theories themselves. Lukacs’ novel ‘glimpses a unified world in the mutual relativity of elements essentially alien to each other’ (75), a kind of unity in disassociation. In doing so it offers a disalienating paradox that is surprisingly close to Bhabha’s third space. Close also to the ‘disjunctive temporality’ which ‘creates a signifying time for the inscription of cultural incommensurability where differences cannot be sublated or totalized because “they somehow occupy the same space.”’ (Bhabha, 1994, 177) And if this ‘symptom of contingency’ (Lukacs, 1978, 77) is therefore troubled by what Lukacs calls ‘bad infinity’ (81) so that it has to take shelter in such strategic closures as giving the novel a biographical form, it is just the same sense of disempowering limitlessness that leads Bhabha and

postcolonial theory of this variety into their own versions of strategic essentialism and ‘contingent closure’ (Bhabha, 1994, 185) as is discussed further in the next chapter.

All of this demonstrates the inversion referred to above by which homelessness as modernist trauma becomes homelessness as postcolonial choice. Still, Young’s point is important. The Marxist narrative of history may well have been too narrow, too certain of what it read as the truth of historical development, too confident in its teleology. Fanon famously urged the need to engage with a broader world history in his call for Marxism to learn to ‘stretch’ if it is to relate to African experience (1965, 31)¹⁹, and Armah (1984) argued that it was nothing less than racist. Young’s suggestion that Marxism is ‘a conceptual system which remains collusively Eurocentric’ (1990, 3) must be taken seriously. But then what? On the one hand the idea of identity as limited to discourses of difference becomes its own universalism, its own essentialism, just as Lyotard’s description of the death of grand narratives inaugurated its own story (Malik, 1996). On the other, for all the exclusions and ‘detours from itself’ (Young, 27) by which it becomes coherent, Marxism is surely correct in recognising the degree to which capitalism is a foundational experience in the modern world. There is nothing mistaken in desiring to make connections, to produce some cartography of a system that, for example, so carefully obscures its spaces of production beneath the apparent radicalism of brand logos and symbols. This is more than mere nostalgia for a lost unity. Arif Dirlik’s well known critique is hugely pertinent:

While capital in its motions continues to structure the world, refusing it foundational status renders impossible the cognitive mapping that must be the point of departure for any practice of resistance and leaves such

¹⁹ Among Fanon’s ‘stretching’ of Marxism, of course, is his discussion of whether, in some contexts, it might not be the peasant class which takes on the revolutionary role usually allocated to the urban proletariat. In his later writings it also relates to his anger at the apparent apathy of the French left in the face of the Algerian fight for independence. Armah repeats the point but without Fanon’s sympathy for the Marxist position.

mapping as there is in the domain of those who manage the capitalist world economy. (1994, 356)

Bauman's (1996) brief account of the shift in Western ontology from a bereft modernism to playful postmodernism reveals powerfully what has been argued above, the degree to which the same human images have been recuperated, only given a more ludic and consumerist spin: the flaneur reincarnated as the strolling shopper, the adventurer returns in a new avatar as the tourist. It is an important point and we need to draw attention to the sociological prehistory of what is often presented as a qualitatively new condition of being. Writing as early as Simmel's essay on the 'the stranger' (1971 [1908]) not only pre-figures Bhabha in the literal sense of employing the same figuration of the 'beyond', but actually makes very parallel arguments. The presence of the stranger, Simmel says, this person who is 'near and far *at the same time*' (1971, 148), exposes to us something fundamental to human associations. Which is to say, the 'more general, at least more insurmountable, strangeness' (148) which threatens the sufficiency of our social bonds, the recognition that they are never wholly unique, nor wholly universal and might easily have been other than they are. In short, that no relation has 'inner and exclusive necessity.' (148)

Despite being inorganically appended to it, the stranger is still an organic member of the group. Its unified life includes the specific conditioning of this element. (1971, 149)

But Simmel and also - more recently and more extensively - Julia Kristeva (1991) are careful to record the specific history of the stranger as a category in Western Europe. It is an important limitation and one which offsets the ontological lode for which the image of the stranger is mined. Simmel's brief account of this history is well worth recalling in the context of the global 'cheap labour economy'²⁰ because it offers a hint

²⁰ The term is borrowed from Chossudovsky (1997) who offers it in description of the rising use of cheaply subcontracted non-Western labour and the linked enforcement of a debt economy which, at least in his analysis, deliberately ensures the maintenance of the conditions under which this policy of

of something important to which we will return shortly. He begins by pointing out that ‘the stranger makes his appearance everywhere as a trader’ (1971, 144), i.e. that their mobility is linked to a non-ownership of land.

Restriction to intermediary trade and often (although sublimated from it) to pure finance give the stranger the specific character of mobility.
(144)

Simmel’s stranger, in other words, arrives on the current of capital, and it is this which affords them their objectivity. From a Marxist point of view, this begs the question: is the ‘insurmountable strangeness’ which follows in their wake a result of their being from elsewhere (revealing as it were, the elsewhere of our being) or as a function of that ‘pure finance’ which affords them their mobility, and whose estranging implications for previous forms of human relationship Marx detailed? In this respect, the aloofness which Simmel associates with the stranger’s double frame of being, their ‘distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness’ (145) cannot be disentangled from the estranging objectivity of the cash economy of which they are the bearers. This is a point which is more, not less pertinent today. Hence Spivak almost exactly repeats Simmel’s point when she reminds us not to forget that it is ‘Capital in the abstract that “frees” the subject of Eurocentric economic migration to stage “culture” in First World multiculturalism.’ (1999, 405)

In any event, it is worth remembering the simple fact that the mobility of trade, the fact that it is not tied to land or specific land-based relationships, does not mean that landlessness equates to mobility. Globalisation as we know, has developed specifically by playing off the mobility of that which feudal usury was to become - ‘fictitious capital’²¹ - against the immobility of those historically severed from their

outsourcing remains profitable. To this ‘market colonialism’, Chossudovsky contends, non-Western destitution is a positive input on the supply side of capital’s equations.

²¹ See Merrifield’s analysis, employing this term from volume 3 of *Capital* in relation to the current formation of capital. (2000, 15-36)

land and the subsistence it provided. Bauman suggests that the threatening mobility of the vagabond, which modernity sought to contain, codify and control, has become postmodernity's archetypal image: 'Now there are few "settled" places left.' (1996, 29) We cannot recall too often in relation to pronouncements of this sort, how strictly and rigidly movement is sanctioned for most of the global population, and in what limited circumstances the ontological image of the tourist or mall-bound shopper is appropriate. The word migrancy marks the slipping from an adjective to an abstract noun of condition, from being migrant to migrant *as* being. Amid the celebratory pronouncements of this new decentred form, we should remember that when the same etymological shift occurred in relation to the term 'vagrant' (i.e. a drift from general adjective to specific noun to an ontological term) the process was inextricably tied up with the contemporary Acts of Vagrancy and the attempts to ensure that prospective labour remained in carefully accountable, ordered space (see, e.g. Chambliss, 1964; Simmel, 1997 [1903]).

Okri: text, dream, world.

On the back cover of the 1992 Vintage edition of *The Famished Road* (TFR) is a citation from Robert Winder's *Independent* review that, together with the banner 'Winner of the 1991 Booker Prize' on the front, is clearly intended to assuage the uncertainty of potential Western buyers faced with the book's apparent foreignness. Winder draws a comfortingly European genealogy: '[I]ts literary lineage - the ease with which spirits move through every day life - is from ancient Greece and medieval romances.' No doubt Ben Okri is capable of claiming such literary predecessors, but there is nevertheless an appropriation involved in this comment. The more immediate

lineage signalled in the text is to Achebe, who first introduced an ogbanje²² character to Nigerian fiction with Ezinma in *Things Fall Apart*, or to Soyinka's sometimes ambivalent vision of the urban poor in *The Interpreters* and his conjunction of myth and realism in *Season of Anomy*.²³ And on the first page of the twelve hundred or so that currently constitute 'The Famished Road Cycle', Okri signals another, perhaps more primary debt by using the word 'uncountable'.²⁴ His reference brings this chapter full circle, because it is, of course, an echo of Amos Tutuola who famously used the word at the outset of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, arousing comment from the commonwealth critics discussed above.²⁵ My suggestion here is that the installation of Ben Okri as probably the most well known 'African writer' in Britain today comes about, at least partly, because his work has such a potentially snug fit with the concerns of that branch of postcolonial theory that I have referred to as new romanticism. In the development of the Famished Road trilogy we witness severance from locality being re-constituted as an access to vision and the privileging of the migrant as a figure of knowledge. At the same time, I would suggest, Okri's trilogy demonstrates something of the danger that this position entails.

²² The child that dies young and is consistently reborn - abiku in Okri - is the ogbanje in Achebe's Igbo setting. There is a brief scene in both books where the spirit-child is asked to recover the hidden token of their supernatural identity by a herbalist. Where Achebe's very conventional realism is scrupulous in allowing the discovery of the token to be read either as manipulation by the medicine-man or as genuine event, Azaro's Mum and Dad cannot afford the ceremony. This refusal to completely sever the link to the spirit world is the necessary first fact in Okri's style: 'I didn't want to entirely lose contact with that other world of light and rainbows and possibilities.' (*TFR*, 9).

²³ As Biodun Jeyifo says, despite the insistence on the *experience* of life for Lagos' poorest in both Soyinka and Okri, the ultimate vision that is offered can be 'reductively individualistic' (1991, 281)

²⁴ The original novel *The Famished Road* (1991) was subsequently furnished with a sequel *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), and the most recent novel *Infinite Riches* (1998) is described as 'volume three of *The Famished Road* cycle', an apt description given Okri's often cyclical idea of unfolding history.

²⁵ In fact Okri's relation to Tutuola is signalled throughout the three novels. Beyond the broader way in which ordinary people are made extraordinary and given mythic stature we find more specific hints of Tutuola in many places, most especially in Azaro's wanderings in the forest, but also in particular figures: the perfect gentleman (*TFR*, 170) and the palm-wine drinkard himself (*IR*, 308) are among those who make appearances in Okri's swirling narrative. For a discussion of what may be Okri's inter-textual references to previous uses of the abiku myth by Soyinka and John Pepper Clark, see Ogunsanwo, 1995. See Quayson, 1997, for a critical attempt to manoeuvre Okri into a tradition headed by Tutuola and Samuel Johnson.

At the outset of *The Famished Road* Azaro's liminality makes available to him a vision that is socially revealing. His ability to see hints of the future, for example, from a position 'somewhere in the interspace between the spirit world and the Living' (*TFR* 5) allows Okri, despite the fact that the three novels are set prior to independence, to make proleptic comment on those regimes that will succeed the colonial. All three books begin with a homecoming. In the first it is Azaro that returns having been captured by a policeman and his wife with what, it is implied, are occult intentions. It is in their house that he sees the spirits of those whose deaths the policeman has caused.²⁶ This is a typical example of the way in which the spirit-child's double framed vision, in that early part of the trilogy especially, is able to strip away ideology in the Marxist sense, to see beyond the cultural camouflage of power. Initially his fantastic vision exposes what is 'real' at a causal level. As Madame Koto's bar becomes the domain of the Party of the Rich Azaro can say 'I saw its other sides' (*TFR* 273), and he bears witness to the disturbing inhumanity of the new clientele, just as the Photographer's pictures have done (*TFR* 160). In this respect there is a tension indicated between sight and concealment, particularly the concealments of power, something that Okri symbolises with various forms of blindness.²⁷ Azaro, with his flickering between different worlds, is always close to the postcolonial archetype of the migrant. His opening refusal to accede to a single identity is precisely what provides his excess vision. He fits well, from the outset, with the high status accorded to exiled existence, to those positioned beyond category, in postcolonial theory. Yet, initially, while Azaro exists between worlds, he exists

²⁶ This is the first hint of a theme that is couched, by the time of *Infinite Riches*, in the new-age language of 'karmic dust'; that is to say, the hidden price of power, the receipt on its Faustian pact.

²⁷ It is noticeable, for example, that those figures associated with political or some other version of control and authority often wear sunglasses. At the same time, Okri's vision of 'the people' shares something with Soyinka and the Achebe of *A Man of the People*, in which the poor are often complicit

between clearly bounded worlds. There is no sense that his ability to cross the border between realms exposes them as artificial, that they are somehow false constructions in the sense that Bhabha's migrant avenges against the categories of western thought. Rather the very definiteness of the boundaries between realms of spirit and human fire him with the status of the 'stranger' in that charged form which Van Gennep²⁸ describes for the ritual participant.²⁹

What makes for part of the brilliance in the early sections of *The Famished Road* is the *limitation* of vision as much as the breadth of it. In the period before characters are overtaken by their mythic outlines, before her expanding legend forces Madame Koto to become a mere absence from the text, before Dad is made a titanic symbol of struggle, there is a real drawing of locality, of lived life and of interaction between characters. After one of his early forest wanderings (*TFR* 65-67) Azaro returns to find he has come too late for the meeting where Dad's debts are settled: 'I had missed the important moment which had transformed the lights in our world.' (*TFR* 68) By the start of *Infinite Riches*, however, when all boundaries have become fluid and the world is uncertain, this sense that one form of vision trades off against another is lost. Azaro no longer needs to sacrifice a witness of human reality for an experience of the spirit world as the two increasingly mingle. He does indeed have

in their situation; too apathetic, too fearful. The communal blindness that overtakes the ghetto when they refuse to acknowledge the death of Ade's father is a typical example. (*SOE* 230 forwards).

²⁸ The stranger is Van Gennep's archetype for the figure who is charged by liminality, possessed of both danger and weakness. 'Whoever passes from one to other [i.e. crosses the zone of liminality] finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds' (1960 [1908], 18) Azaro describes the spirit-child as 'those who, though appearing normal, are in fact wondering strangers on this earth.' (*SOE* 198) Later we see the degree to which Azaro's vision becomes the common property of the poor and so mum's early statement 'those who suffer are strangers to the world.' (*TFR* 201) takes on a new level of meaning.

²⁹ It is certainly on these grounds that Femi Osofisan defends the Okri of *The Famished Road* against charges that he has retreated to mere 'formal aestheticism'. (Osofisan, 1997, Part IV, 3) It also for these reasons that I find it hard to agree with Maja-Pearce's assessment that the first book is a 'tedious exercise in the fantastic for its own sake.' (Maja-Pearce, 1992, 103).

access to ‘infinite riches in a little room’³⁰ when he can, without ever leaving his bed, witness all that happens to all surrounding characters and their inner thoughts. Under the increasing penetration of his migrant powers of vision it is hardly surprising that the narrower portrayal of the ghetto world and all of its blind spots is lost. In the early stages of *The Famished Road* Azaro gets a hint of what is happening in the wider nation by listening to the conversations of women in Madame Koto’s bar (*TFR* 76). By the time of *Infinite Riches* he can show us the dreams and family scenes of the Governor General without any mediation other than his own powers of vision.³¹

Something similar happens to Azaro’s father. Notwithstanding the exuberant brilliance of the character that Dad becomes as he takes on the mantle of Black Tyger, it is an expansion which replaces the witness of his more mundane struggles as a load-carrier. As the ‘blurring of dreams and reality’ (Okri, in interview with Wilkinson, 1992, 85) increases Dad emerges as more than, as larger than human. Earlier in the novel, however, Azaro had watched him de-humanised in a very different manner, distorted, crushed as he labours under the weight of salt bags in the lorry-park. (*TFR* 146-149) Such merely terrestrial vision is increasingly rare in the later books although it makes a return in the brief, brilliant chapter at the end of *Songs of Enchantment* where all of Dad’s heroism is deflated by a sudden recognition of ‘the bald facts of our lives’ (291).

³⁰ This is the quote from Marlowe with which Okri prefaces the third book in the cycle and from which he draws his title. It is relevant because it foregrounds his increasingly romantic sense of the potential brilliance of all human life, regardless of circumstance, where its participants can learn the possibility of ‘redemption by beauty’. (*IR* 192) Proleptically, ‘Laughter Beneath the Bridge’, the civil-war short story in *Incidents at the Shrine*, has a protagonist who puzzles over the experience of beauty in the midst of horror.

³¹ There is an extent to which this widening of vision relates to a widening breadth of the imagined community. It is a significant moment when, for the first time, the people of the ghetto appear in that key vehicle of national imagining, the print media: ‘Everywhere people who had been content to listen to the news of the country only in the form of rumours were now seen to be scrutinising the same page of the newspaper, as if overnight newsprint had been given a new importance. [...] For the first time in our lives we as a people had appeared in the newspapers.’ (*TFR* 156)

In contrast to Lukacs' argument that the novel might perhaps provide the means to salvage some coherence from 'bad infinity' we could hardly have a more clear example of the revaluation of modernist trauma as positive uncertainty than Okri's statement that 'the novel, as a form, if it is not going to be artificial, can only move towards infinity [...] It must open towards infinity.' (Wilkinson, 1992, 83-84). This is indeed the track of Azaro's widening vision and gives some indication of why Okri's work is so well received in the current climate of postcolonial theory. 'The significance of an *abiku* narrator' says John Hawley, 'is that it moves African literature closer to the postmodern movement.' (1995, 31; see also Wright, 1997, 181-207) Okri, he argues, marks a break with the social concerns of the first generation (and many second generation) Nigerian authors, replacing a political with an aesthetic agenda. At this point we might recall what is cited above: that part of the motivation for the adoption of Tutuola by earlier critics was that his art was apparently unencumbered by the social concerns that dogged his contemporaries. The romantic continuity is apparent.

As part of his famous critique in 1974, Achebe described Joseph Conrad's very distinctive weight of language, his use of heavy adjectives as a kind of syntactical hypnosis that helped him perpetuate a myth of African inscrutability (Achebe, 1988, 1-3). Something strange happens in Okri: despite the fact of Azaro's increasingly omniscient narration the world becomes harder to decipher and an odd reminiscence of Conrad's style emerges in the resulting crypticism:

The world turned on an inscrutable axis and plunged us into an alien terrain. We heard a tree groaning deep in the forest. Then a fantastic noise shook the earth. (*SOE* 22)

And everything in that world had a sun at its centre. The trees. The images of an unimaginable god. (*IR* 306)

There are long passages in both the later novels that are heavy with a sense of significance but whose meaning is, like so many of the trilogy's riddling conversations, 'inscrutable'. The narrative moves into 'a surging and constantly transmogrifying reality' (Hawley, 1995, 36), a terrain of superimpositions, none of which can claim priority, and as a result a coherent mapping is made increasingly difficult. Okri may preface his middle novel with Virgil's 'Blessed are those who know the causes of things' but the book itself recognises very few causal relationships. Instead there are moments where Okri approaches a negritudist revaluation of Conrad's myth of African mystery.³²

It is particularly in the short chapter near the end of *The Famished Road* that Azaro begins to link his liminality, his migrancy, to a sense that all things are relative: 'that no way is ever definitive, no truth ever final, and that there are never really any beginnings or endings' (488). Of course, this possibility was always there, especially when the narrative wanders into spaces where the boundaries between worlds is least secure: markets, crossroads and, as a particular example, Madame Koto's arena. In one of Homi Bhabha's essays there is a discussion of a moment from Barthes when the philosopher, half drunk in a bar, catches hold for a second, amid the wash of words, of a kind of meaning prior to language, 'the hybrid moment outside the sentence' (Bhabha, 1992, 447). Azaro, half drunk in the mutable arena of the palm-wine bar, discovers similar approximations to Bhabha's third space, a hybridity which appears equally to erase 'inside/outside, past/present, those foundationalist

³² See for example, the 'sacred grove' discovered by Dad and Azaro in the forest, populated by silent, contemplative statues: 'They were a people with intelligent faces and serene personalities, listening to the great commandments of the universe [...] Priests of old religions used to conduct initiations here. This place filled them with wisdom. It was also an oracle.' (*IR* 154) Or, alternatively, his discussion of the 'celestial caravans of the forgotten and undiscovered African Way' (*SOE* 161) 'The Way of compassion and fire and serenity' (159). Or, again, the procession of the 'higher beings' during the much delayed rally. (*IR* 290-293). Maggi Phillips has argued, with a somewhat different intention to mine, that Okri's narratives seek to reclaim the 'dark river' that wound its way through Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. (1997, 167-179).

epistemological positions of Western empiricism' (Bhabha, 1992, 448). Increasingly throughout the three novels this sets the template of the narrative itself.

The spirit child's story is a continual questioning of the boundaries of what we comfortably assume to be the 'real', and as such it often provides powerful moments of insight and defamiliarisation. In this respect, one might argue that Okri is following Soyinka's manifesto against a Western compartmentalisation of the world, producing instead what the earlier writer once proposed: an 'imaginative liberation' (Soyinka, 1976, 121). Yet on the other hand, he is also reflecting an increasing recognition of the degree to which reality and its recording are manipulated by the powerful. In *Infinite Riches* particularly he talks about 'history as a dream rewritten by those who know how to change the particulars of memory.' (345) In the official erasure of the apocalyptic riot that follows the rally, he is borrowing a scene from Márquez, and more broadly from the magic realist theme of the constructedness of national memory. It is the fruition of a motif that runs through the trilogy as a whole, one which is there in the Night of Political Magicians (*SOE* 144-148)³³ and in the aftermath of a much earlier riot (*TFR* 183). What Biodun Jeyifo says of Okri's first novels holds true here:

The "reality" constructed in each of these novels constantly draws attention to itself and beyond this questions are raised about its adequacy of [sic] capturing the night-marish, chaotic reality of post-Civil War, oil-doom Nigeria. (1991, 179)

We are back, in a sense, with that same anxiety over communication that haunted Wordsworth, or with the newly inadequate nature of mimesis that Lukacs diagnosed.

The result is two-fold. Firstly there is no longer any reality which is certain or concrete. Azaro's vision is initially linked to place, hence the importance of

³³ He sets up, in the final novel, a kind of competitive recording of history between the Governor General with his 're-writings' on the one hand, and the tapestry weaving old woman on the other. Again, the latter motif is familiar from Rushdie's *Shame*.

homecoming at the start of each novel. Sight is always consequent on site. Yet, by the middle of *Songs of Enchantment*, this sense of groundedness is at best problematic. Azaro's 'circling spirit' can offer no certain order of the world, only the possibility that 'there aren't any beginnings or endings' as Okri suggests (Wilkinson, 1992, 86). This ties into the idea that 'all things are linked' (*SOE* 58), that 'everything is connected' (*SOE* 147) which is another recurring idea in the trilogy. But without any access to a ground of selection Azaro's vision of connections threatens to become a confusion, the narrative stretches towards that infinity Okri suggested and the form becomes rhizomatic, in typical poststructural fashion. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1981) What is forfeit is a hope of any causal linkage, the remnants of this kind of connection lie in the vague insinuations of karmic revenge. As Hawley says, Okri's holism means that 'closure cannot be brought about' (1995, 35). Sacrificed is what Azaro himself calls, at one point, 'the liberty of limitations' (*TFR* 487).

The second thing that happens is that a recognition of reality's mutability moves from being Azaro's gift or curse for dwelling in the interspaces and becomes instead the wider possession of a majority of characters in the book. Suddenly everyone is encountering spirits, miracles, uncertainties. We have already seen how the migrant intellectual is taken as a precursor of a new universal condition, our common strangeness, in some recent theory. Here Okri writes the process in fiction, with the abiku as pathsetter. And at this point the conjunction between Okri's fiction and new romanticism is clearest. In his collection of critical essays and considerations *A Way of Being Free* all of this is played out for the reader. Okri begins by portraying the poet³⁴ as bearer of a unique burden, a walker on different paths, a person that refuses to ignore the beauty of life. (1997, 1-18) What the artist offers, he says, is the

³⁴ We have already seen the extent to which the poetic was the privileged mode for the original romantics. In this respect Okri's conclusion of *Infinite Riches* with a poem of sorts is notable.

possibility of new dreams, of dreams that might change our lives. Yet by the final essay this burden has fallen upon a broader constituency: the oppressed. It is only they, Okri suggests, that can find the belief and strength to dream again. (128-133)

The only hope is in daring to redream one's place in the world - a beautiful act of imagination, and a sustained self-becoming [...] New vision should come from those who suffer most and who love life the most. The marvellous responsibility of the unheard and the unseen resides in this paradox [...] The real quarrel of the oppressed is not with the oppressors. It is with themselves. (1997: 55, 103, 133)

What I want to draw attention to here is the degree to which the politics of Okri's writing comes together in convocation with a contemporary theoretical focus on the social as imaginative construction, as a realm of discursivity. The primary importance that is placed upon 're-dreaming the world', Dad's continual insistence to Azaro that we need new visions to live out, the romantic privileging of a great act of imagination: all of this holds a good deal more power and conviction where the dominant metaphor for the social world is a textual one³⁵, or psychological, as in Bhabha's more Lacanian writing. Okri implies politics primarily as a matter of epiphany rather than embedded institution, vision as an access to dreams and prophecy rather than casual connection. Of course, it is arguable that subaltern groups can change nothing before they come to think beyond divisive, sectarian and parochial forms of identity. But nevertheless, there seems to me to be something perverse in the fact that Okri gives primacy to this change in self-perception, this supposed 'failure to dream'. It is a statement that is only comprehensible in the context of an increasingly dematerialised understanding of political action.

Okri is not the only current artist of Nigerian origin whose work has met with public success in the climate of this post-confrontational new romanticism. Niru

³⁵ I have already noted, above, that Spivak's use of the idea 'texting the world' is valuable at least in that it resists simplistic readings. Hence her clever use of the term 'textile', to describe the discursive limitations that affect human lives and which have, as the word suggests, material results.

Ratnam has usefully shown how Turner prize winner Chris Ofili's 'open-ended, ludic approach mirrors a shift in contemporary postcolonial theory.' (1999, 155) Ofili's work demonstrates a playful pastiche of identity politics that shares a great deal with Okri and an equal correlation with en vogue concepts like hybridity. It also exposes, however unwittingly, the limitations of such a concept, just as I would argue Okri's writing does. Analysing Ofili's well known *No Woman, No Cry* Ratnam says:

The main problem lies with hybridity's, and Ofili's, mode of address. Irony, contingency, ambiguity can have little place in the case of a racist murder[.] (158)

One senses exactly the same kind of discomfort when Okri's own discussion of 'The Joys of Storytelling' tries to bring into its compass the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa. (1997, 62-70)

Omafume Onoge it is who argues that while migrancy may offer a new sense of relativism to the writer, with it there also comes a certain blindness to the everyday existence of struggle against oppression (1974a, 39-45 and personal communication), of a fight which is neither simply textual nor dreamt. What Aijaz Ahmad says of Rushdie is very relevant here:

Self-exile [..has..] become more common among artists in every successive phase of bourgeois culture since the early days of Romanticism, and as the experience itself has been chosen with greater frequency, the sense of celebration and of "the migrant intellectual root[ing] itself in itself" has grown proportionately. It is the palpable presence of this kind of living in Rushdie's work [that gives rise to] an accompanying inability to believe in any community of actual praxis[.] (1992, 158)

Okri is not Rushdie and his trajectory to Britain was more fraught than that of his predecessor. Nevertheless, his severance from the social world³⁶ in which his work is

³⁶ It is interesting to note that at least among some of his audience this sense of disconnection was felt to deserve remark: the following excerpt from an interview comes after I have just asked if the interviewee, a Nigerian and reader of much Nigerian fiction, felt that the expatriate status of some of the famous Nigerian authors was altering their fiction.

set parallels the development of a fiction that increasingly accommodates the kind of focus on discourse typical of this new romanticism, what Hawley describes as ‘the politics of the interior.’ (1995, 34) Critical reception of his work has not been slow to align this thematic with his expatriate status. Ato Quayson, for example, argues that Okri’s migrancy has given him a vision of the fluid boundaries between worlds which is a continuation of the insights from oral modes that first inspired Tutuola:

Okri arrives at this important intuition [of the ‘fluid interchange of various subjectivities’] through his own placement at another conjuncture of increasing importance in the constitution of identity for the Nigerian [...] that is the condition of exile or residence in the diaspora where the need to negotiate multiple identities becomes most acute. (1997, 150)³⁷

In a way the bleakest part of Okri’s trilogy is his tacit recognition of the insufficiency of ‘re-dreaming the world.’ Part of the poem with which he ends *Infinite Riches* reads ‘The secret side of things is open to us [...] The age of dreaming has come’ (394), almost as *The Famished Road* had ended ‘A dream can be the highest point of a life.’ (500) Yet Dad, who more than any other figure in the book perhaps, fights to follow his dreams, to live out his visions, to imagine the world in new ways and try and put this into practice, never gets beyond acts of individual heroism. For all his imaginings he achieves, in the conclusion, very little that is substantive. There is, therefore, real melancholy when the two abiku presences, near the end of the third novel, discuss the endless human propensity to forget their dreams (*IR* 389-390). The reader is reminded of Azaro’s visionary witness much earlier of a people forever labouring to build a road they never complete (*TFR* 328-330).³⁸ As in Soyinka, the

R: Like Ben Okri [...] Yeah, I mean he still relates, you know with home and you still see it in his writings but progressively he’s losing it you know, because he’s no longer part of that experience. (Male, 21-35, lecturer, Mother: trader, Father: trader).

³⁷ Owusu, for his part, has called Okri’s writing ‘essentially a *diasporan* achievement’. (2000, 8)

³⁸ The break that the later Okri has made with the position of many second generation Nigerian English-speaking authors is clear if we take - one example from among many possible - Osundare’s call for a more empowering literature, one that asserts not ‘a merely epistemological vision of life [but] a teleological vision of it’. (Birbalsingh, 1988, 102)

road metaphor is, at least in some respect, an analogue to modernity. But it also has implications of a project towards social change that never actually progresses, being always deferred on the basis that the possible agents of this change are not yet ready. Politics as concrete action is replaced by politics as imaginative envisaging, itself subject to continual forgetting. The one mention of the word revolution within the trilogy is incorporated back into a fatalism of time and place (*IR* 231-232).

Conclusion.

The discussion of ‘new romanticism’ in this chapter is, in effect, a kind of tool. Like Timothy Brennan’s delineation of ‘cosmopolitanism now’, it is an attempt to point out ‘the specific limits of inclusion on the emergent canon of third-world literature’ (1997, 45) and this ties into a more institutionally focussed discussion of the same limits in chapter three. For all the difference between postcolonial and commonwealth critical work, it is in the figure of the migrant writer, the transmuted scholar gypsy, that a continuity is visible.

We are on the way, by this time, to the stereotype of the *poète maudit*, endowed with an ambiguous gift of sensibility which makes him at the same time more blessed and more cursed than the other members of a society from which he is [...] an outcast. (Abrams, 1953, 103)

This romantic notion of the promethean artist could describe, almost equally well, the conception of Tutuola in commonwealth literary theory, or the migrant as category in Bhabha, or Okri’s own consideration of the artist in *A Way of Being Free* or *Astonishing the Gods*.

As is more fully discussed in chapter three, there are extraordinary difficulties that face Nigerian based authors seeking to be published in their own country, let alone by a western publisher, including the need to fund print-runs personally, the

absence of a sufficient distribution network and the prohibitive lack of a book buying public. In the light of this, it has to be suggested that, at least in part, the emphasis on the migrant writer as the prominent figure in our conception of postcolonial writing is a means of valorising such fiction as finds its way onto the western market. If culture is no longer the realm of sweetness and light, but rather of complexity over binaries, indeterminacy over false closure; if these are its new parameters, it is nevertheless a similar type of writing that is being excluded. A writing for which the exposure of oppositions is both apparent and necessary, writing which is involved in specific, named struggle. As Brennan argues, and as is apparent in Okri's work, complexity is not necessarily any more valuable than dichotomy, indeed at the point where it loses any explicative potential it becomes mystifying in every sense of the word (Brennan, 1997, chapter 2). If we are not to accede to a new romanticism and the politically eviscerating potential of that position, we need to remember writing that is drawn from community and place. Writing which is linked, in the words of A. J. Dagga Tolar, to 'they who gave the song to the poet.'³⁹

³⁹ Dagga Tolar is the publicity secretary for the 'Campaign for Independent Unionism' in Nigeria. The line is from his poem *Is this the poet's manifesto?* which includes the following: 'Poetry is a struggle / Purposed to liberate / To emancipate, not / Only in pursuit / To acquire a flag / To acquire dependence anew / To acquire power, but / Of power and the use / Of power, to better existence / Human existence[.]' (Dagga Tolar, 1997)

Chapter 2: The Migrant and the Strategic.

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the original romantic conception of the migrant intellectual was, in part, a form of survival strategy, a re-reading of necessity as choice. The alienation of cultural production attendant on the rise of a capitalist market, the inevitable diminution of imaginative and intellectual artefacts to commodities was conceptualised in inverted terms, as the withdrawal of a realm of *true* culture. This is apparent, for example, in Williams' tracing of the etymology of that word (1976, 76-82)¹, and we know from Bourdieu how successful in many respects this 'conquest of autonomy' has been, notwithstanding the supposed postmodern collapse of high/low cultural barriers. This subsequent section extends the suggestion that the recent aggrandization of the migrant intellectual equally celebrates necessity as if it were a matter of choice, and speaks of a desire for some space from which a critique of the western hegemony is plausibly available. We begin with the most noticeable critical absentee from the previous chapter, Edward Said.

Edward Said and the migrant position.

Exile, far from being the fate of nearly forgotten unfortunates who are dispossessed and expatriated, becomes something closer to a norm, an experience of crossing boundaries and charting new territories in defiance of classic canonic enclosures, however much its loss and sadness should be registered. (Said, 1993, 384)

¹ Useful to recall also, courtesy of Williams, the tangled etymology of 'culture' and 'colony', both deriving from the common Latin root-word *colere*. Modern scientific usage, of course, retains the proximity of meaning, but what the etymology implies here is something like Benjamin's famous statement that there is no document of civilisation that is not also a document of barbarism. Spivak has argued powerfully that we should recall the degree to which the history of literary studies (culture) is embroiled with that of the colonies: 'the hegemonic definition of literature is itself caught within the history of imperialism.' (1999, 131)

It would certainly be possible to argue that there is a *position* of ‘the migrant’ in something like the sense that Bourdieu uses the term. That is to say, the idea of a particular space or set of spaces in the field of cultural production, an outline or a potential, designated by the term ‘migrant writer’ or ‘migrant intellectual’. However much this relies for its meaningful constitution on the operations of the whole relational field, on all those past formations immanent within it (as the previous chapter suggested) and on the broader field of power superimposed upon it (which is certainly part of the argument of this thesis); notwithstanding all of this, on a more individual level it is Edward Said, to a greater extent than any other author, who has helped carve out that position in terms of both his personal trajectory and in his critical development of the idea. Put more conventionally: Said it is who, quite apart from being the most commonly credited originating point for ‘postcolonial theory’, is crucial in inaugurating the discussion of the figure of the migrant writer.

There was, as has been variously pointed out (Young, 1990, 126-140; Moore-Gilbert, 1997a, 34-73; Ahmad, 1992, 159-221; Grossberg, 1996) something of an aporia at the heart of Said’s project in *Orientalism*. Borrowing from Foucault and Gramsci, Said had discussed Orientalism as a discursive creation, a set of representations that delimited ‘the Orient’ for western understanding and operated on all that could be said about it, beginning with the very idea that it existed as a somehow other, separate and homogenous space. He explicitly remarks on the impossibility of anyone being able to talk outside the control of Orientalism’s ‘lexicographical police action[.]’ (1991 [1978], 155)² As Young says, the most obvious and ‘significant lacuna’ (1990, 127) of this groundbreaking work becomes, therefore, how Said himself is able to escape the conditions of the discourse he has

described, given that he clearly sees its existence as continuous to the present day. Rather than reprising this well-known critique in detail, what I want to point out is that the figure of the migrant, especially the migrant intellectual, enters Said's work here as *both* problem and solution.

Problem, because it is with those early orientalist travellers such as Lane and Chateaubriand that he is forced to face the dilemma of how such a purely discursive creation as 'the Orient' could ever articulate with or have an instrumental effect in relation to real space. However much this imaginative geography was an invention of European academic knowledge production, it did have a putative referent in real if hazily bounded earth. And it was, broadly speaking, to that ground that these figures and others such as Flaubert and Burton journeyed. In doing so, or rather in the fact that Said employs their accounts of having done so, these travel writers, pilgrims, adventurers, demonstrate that there must be some conjunction between that which is imaginative and that which actually exists. It is these migrants, then, that force the crisis in Said between what Young terms 'representation and the real' (1990, 129).

Said's attempts to resolve this dilemma, particularly his separation of 'latent' and 'manifest' forms of Orientalism, are discussed in detail in the accounts referred to above and in his own re-consideration of the topic (1997 [1985]) as well as in interview (e.g. 1998, 81-96). What I want to underscore here, however, is the way in which he makes the very figure of his problem act as figure of his solution. Through his work, and especially by the time we reach *Culture and Imperialism*, it is the migrant writer who has become Said's way out of the discursive field's apparently unbreachable hegemony:

² Said's more well-known comment is that 'It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric.' (1991, 204)

The problem returns of how to effect critical distance. If it is necessary, as Said demonstrates, to be inside such [discursive] structures in order to make any argument at all, it is also, he argues, vital to be outside them in order to subvert them. (Young, 1990, 128)

Critical distance, inside and yet outside: we are back with Azaro again. As Moore-Gilbert argues (1997a, 41-44, 61-66), it is the position of the migrant intellectual which becomes Said's means of escape from the encompassing terms of Orientalism as he has drawn it. The means, indeed, of effecting his own critique, and the means of resolving that dilemma of the universal and particular, individual and structure that Young points out. Not that this is somehow a covert move in Said. The quote from Hugo of St. Victor which Auerbach cites and which Said references in his discussion of that later critic, catches the position well:

The more one is able to leave one's own cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance. (1991, 259)

The theme returns in his discussion of the 'voyage in', the interventions of third world intellectuals in metropolitan culture (1990, 27-50) and is at its most apparent in *Culture and Imperialism* where he reinstates the original text, this time citing it on his own behalf:

The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place. (1993, 407)

He has just discussed at this point the degree to which the migrant distils the archetypal predicaments of modernity, just as Berger et al had done in *The Homeless Mind*.³ Said, however, produces a familiar reversal and goes on to call the migrant the embodiment of those 'unhoused, decentered' energies (403) which are envisaged as

³ 'And while it would be the rankest Panglossian dishonesty to say that the bravura performances of the intellectual exile and the miseries of the displaced person or refugee are the same, it is possible, I think,

modernity's best possibilities of resistance and liberation. They come to represent, he argues, the 'anti-narrative energy' (337), the anti-teleological movement which he considers as antidote, in both its lived and artistic expressions, to the dangerous linearity of such communal fictions as the 'nation' or the 'canon'⁴. They are, we might say, the symbol of that contrapuntal criticism advocated at the end of *Culture and Imperialism*, and indeed Said comes close to making this correlation himself when he describes 'these exilic energies whose incarnation today is the migrant and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile' (403). Or again, when in his Reith lectures he specifically correlates the 'median state' (1994, 36) of the expatriate and the marginality of the intellectual, suggesting unambiguously: '[The] intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile.' (1994, 39)

So, the position of the migrant intellectual first emerges in the field of postcolonial theory as a marker of both Said's aporia and also his escape route. It emerges as a position which has, as we have already seen, the traces of its previous incarnations upon it. As in the quotes above, a combination of intimacy and distance becomes formula for 'true vision'. Again the conjunction between postcolonial theory and romanticism, as figured in the migrant, is very apparent. Young puts it succinctly:

the only possible conflict can arise from the intervention of the outsider critic, a romantic alienated being battling like Byron's Manfred[.] (1990, 135)

What this becomes in Said, then, is a means by which to retain the category of the human, to hold respect for individual agency in the face of an otherwise airtight

to regard the intellectual as first distilling, then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity[.]' (Said, 1993, 403)

⁴ For a recent correlation of the same, see S. S. Sandhu's intriguing essay on early migrant African Ignatius Sancho. Sancho's friendship and correspondence with Laurence Sterne is well known, but Sandhu makes the suggestion that what may originally have attracted him to Sterne's work was not simply the latter's abolitionist position on slavery, but rather the peripatetic, digressive literary style

discursive field. It squares the circle, making plausible the act of critique from inside a supposedly totalised system and the first such act it legitimates, therefore, is his own.

But how to read this? To Young, Said is forced into such acrobatics precisely because of his outmoded 'endorsement of the validity of individual experience as affording a theoretical and political base' (1990, 134). Because, in other words, he ignores Foucault's 'downgrading' of individual agency on the one hand and Derrida's argument that no system is ever satisfactorily 'closed' on the other. Said, from this perspective, falls back on the migrant as result of a refusal to accept a fully poststructural inheritance. His mistake is not that he foregrounds 'a double perspective that never sees things in isolation' (Said, 1994, 44), but that he then goes on to suggest that 'from that juxtaposition one gets a better, *perhaps even more universal* idea of how to think[.]' (44)

Bhabha, of course, would hesitate over the term universalism, with all the liberal baggage it carries, but it is notable that even on his side of the poststructural critique the migrant is still the precursory figure of some kind of human unity. On the one hand he terms them 'supplementary', the ones who cannot be added-up into the body politic.⁵ On the other, it is from this position of liminality, 'that we are able to translate the differences [...] into a kind of solidarity.' (Bhabha, 1994, 170)⁶ We can see a similar move in Sanford Budick's development of the concept of a 'secondary otherness', a concept something like Bhabha's third space, which is his name for a

which, Sandhu argues, Sancho was in a peculiar position to appreciate in that it shared something with the trajectory of his own life. (1998, 88-106)

⁵ Bhabha here plays on the term 'supplement' as used by Derrida: 'Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidarity.' (Bhabha, 1994, 155)

⁶ Exactly how this might come to work, or be put to work in the context of actual political struggle is not altogether clear. It is, Bhabha has more recently said, 'the difficult, *non-utopian* thought that one has to think: what structures and strategies of praxis, organisation, interpellation, coalition can be held, painfully and paradoxically, 'in common' between antagonistic political philosophies in the performative and practice-bound realm.' (1998, 40-1) Beyond the re-definition of the problem it is not wholly clear what form of solution is invoked.

epiphanic awareness of the limits of any knowledge about 'the other.' Budick also argues that it is in the territory of this 'crisis of alterity' that there may be 'the potentiality for a sharing of consciousness.' (Budick, 1996, 21)

Aijaz Ahmad makes the important point in a discussion of Said that misrepresentation, bigotry and xenophobia are in no way uniquely European qualities:

What gave European forms of these prejudices their special force in history [...] was not some transhistorical process of ontological obsession and falsity - some gathering of unique forces in domains of discourse - but, quite specifically, the power of colonial capitalism[.] (1992, 184)

The position of the migrant as drawn in the field of postcolonial theory, so-called, speaks of the need for a space of critique or political action that cannot be easily accommodated where a key conception is that of the water-tight discursive field. Nor easily in those analyses that move in the opposite direction, rejecting the closure of any discursive position and thereby rendering political action problematic. For these writers, as is more fully discussed below, the confrontation is with something like an inverted version of Said's dilemma: how do you critique a discourse that is already fractured and anxious, given that these qualities scar your own subject position? The migrant, it seems to me, is still appropriated as a means to get beyond this difficulty. If Bhabha uses the migrant as the image of the incompleteness of projects of national imagining, they are also supplementary in a different sense. That is to say, the figure of the migrant is that which is allowed to step, surreptitiously, out of the grounds of this criticism itself. Where there is no possibility of common identity, where political action becomes the contestation of alternative misrepresentations: under these prescriptions and proscriptions it is the position of the migrant which is licensed to place one enabling foot beyond the field. Overtly, the liminal nature of this oddly unified category relates to cultural and national boundaries, but the liminality with

which it is actually invested is one which situates it just beyond the full implications of anti-foundationalist theory itself. Jameson has a famous discussion of the abolition of critical distance in the supposedly post-modern West (1984, 85 forwards). It is to just such a sense of world without external vantage points, an enclosure that is either overly complete (such as the image of European discourse in *Orientalism*) or disabblingly incomplete (as in Bhabha) that the migrant intellectual as a position is made available, offering a place of critique. Jameson's own later account of third-world literature as imagining something beyond the 'isolated monads' of the west rather reinforces my suggestion.⁷

It is not that postcolonial theory is somehow without material reference. To suggest this would require the excision of a great deal of what Spivak has written, and indeed the whole thrust of Said's own early project which sought to emphasise the institutional origins of Orientalism as a kind of science of imperialism, the complicity of cultural works in historical repressions. What remains unclear, though, is how the material and discursive frames of Said's project, for example, interact. Asked about this in interview, his response 'I don't think they can be reconciled' (1998, 93) suggests that it constitutes an on-going difficulty. His later return to the trope of 'rootlessness' in the same interview, and to the joining of commitment and distance reveal again that the migrant continues to be the means by which this impasse is negotiated. In the conclusion it is Ahmad's point about priority that is missing here. Whatever the role of cultural construction in legitimating, consolidating and even enabling the colonial and neocolonial orders, oppression is both first and finally

⁷ 'The view from the top [i.e. Euroamerican culture] is epistemologically crippling, and reduces its subjects to the illusions of a host of fragmented subjectivities [...] without collective pasts or futures bereft of any possibility of grasping totality. [...] All of this is denied to 3rd world culture, which must be situational and materialist despite itself.' (1986, 85)

premised on facts of economics, production and military dominance. Spivak commented in an early interview:

I'm not suggesting that there is a necessarily hard reality out there. In fact I would argue the opposite, that it is always dredged up as a slogan. But I would also not want to identify such reality with the production of signs. Something else *might* be going on. (1990, 53)

In the face of this equivocation we can understand why such a politically concerned criticism requires a figure placed fractionally beyond its own prescription.⁸ It is this dynamic, I would suggest, rather than simply a desire for self-aggrandisement as later suggested by Ahmad, that drives the continual conjuring up of 'the migrant' in critics after Said.

To end I want to refer to a point made by Kadiatu Kanneh. She notes that Africa has always been the site 'outside of theory', and in a sense, as has just been argued, this is exactly the charge with which the migrant position is fired. What she goes on to argue, however, is that the position of the exile or traveller, regardless of its constitution in Western theorising, is *not* in any necessary sense a space of special liberty:

The African migrant, for example - exile, slave, returnee - has had, over the last two centuries at least, an ambiguous identity. [H]is or her position as translator, interlocutor and interpreter through learned languages and politics makes the migrant the inhabitant of a complicated space, both indigenous *and* foreign, both of the west and alien to it. However, far from being free of the operations of power, the (African) migrant occupies the dangerous position of speaking *for* a native population *to or from* the metropolis.' (1998, 31)

The very different conception of the migrant from an African perspective is returned to in the next chapter. My argument here is that the theorising of the position in the generalised sense initiated by Said has not sufficiently taken account of the degree to

⁸ Terry Eagleton it is who notes, in a recent review of Spivak's work, that postcolonial studies are caught in a powerless space between their own political intention and the theoretical frameworks they employ. (1999, 3-6)

which the expatriate intellectual's position is both a fragile and potentially very complicit space.⁹

Strategic essentialism.

We have seen that the migrant is read as the figure who disrupts falsely essential categories, reveals the lie in the claim of group identity at whatever level to be homogenous. They come to represent a kind of metonym for the implausibility of closed or totalised cultural imaginings. James Clifford's discussion of the 'ex-centric' native, of those who have 'dwelling-in-travel' (1992, 102) argues something along these lines: that as we move the focus of our epistemologies from relations of residence to relations of movement, we learn a form of common de-territorialization, learn that identity, rather than being a closed kernel, is a set of mutable practices and dispositions. Clifford's argument, in particular the underlying critique of the traditional anthropological model of the outward journey to a stable and pristine other culture is important and obviously related to that of Appadurai. He is, furthermore, careful to warn against reading his thesis as an advocacy of a kind of 'nomadology' or 'postmodern primitivism' (115) which projects onto a variety of journeys a Western avant-garde predicament.

Nevertheless, bell hooks, in a paper presented after Clifford's argues that his evocation of motels and other tourist spaces 'would always make it difficult for there

⁹ To say this is not an allocation of blame, at least not in any generalised and simplistic sense. One of the most powerful documents to depict the negotiations of this complicit space is also one of the earliest: Olaudah Equiano's narrative of his life (Edwards (ed.), 1988 [1789]). Throughout his autobiography, Equiano has to face the contradiction that his survival can only be survival as a facilitating intermediary within a system he detests and whose violence he has experienced at first hand. His longing to return to 'old England', it is clear, is partially about a longing to find a place where the sharp edge of this contradictory position is blunted, if only by the veiling of the most vicious aspects of slavery (77-92). Whether by artistic embellishment or factual co-incidence, Equiano figures

to be a recognition of an experience of travel that is not about play but is an encounter with terrorism.’ (1992, 343) She goes on to explain this in reference to her own experience of border crossing in the face of white authority, the traversal of boundaries policed not by ‘lexicographical action’ but by men in uniform. It is a moment also variously discussed by Meena Alexander (1998, 16-17) and Gayatri Spivak (1990, 19-80). Here, hooks implies, migrancy confirms rather than problematises the imposing presence of national frontiers and the degree to which these are overlaid with such other lines of power as relate to gender and race.¹⁰ It is a crucial amendment to a dominant image of travel which too easily universalises the comfortable crossings experienced by Western tourists. Furthermore, it should remind us of an insistent historical fact: any discussion of migrancy in the context of imperialism has to take account of the massive, enforced transportation of slaves, and that this cannot be understood outside of a recognition of the capitalist economics which motivated it. With this in mind hooks’ subsequent comment is particularly important:

The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity [...] has also become a way to perpetuate the terror by providing a cover, a hiding place. (1992, 345)

It is not only the rhetoric of pluralism that can act as cover to ongoing oppression, such poststructural re-conceptions of difference as Bhabha’s hybridity notion can come to serve the same effect. This dangerous potential is revealed in the continual return of recent criticism to the problem of how anti-foundationalist positions can retrieve some semblance of common solidarity, unity or identity from

this impossible position, this aporia, very powerfully in the scene in which he damns a ship on which he is currently working (106), an act that immediately leads to its foundering and nearly to his death.

¹⁰ It is a reminder similar to that made by Zolberg in the field of the sociology of migration, in which the author emphasises a point otherwise elided in the various models of migrant dynamics: ‘[I]t is

which to act. As part of a distinguishing move from the broader arena of postmodern thought, writers like Young have claimed for the study of colonial discourse and contemporary imperial re-formations an overt political dimension (1998, 4-8). But where to find shared ground for any putative political programme in a world that supposedly reveals only our common human strangeness or the continual fragmentation of subject identity? As Nicholas Thomas notes in relation to Maori and Aboriginal struggles:

[A] preoccupation with divisions and hybridity may often be more compatible with individual artistic creativity than the forms of collective representation and mobilization that remain crucial in many political domains. (1994, 188)

Suffice to say that Thomas' implicit answer to this divergence draws on the most ubiquitous and famous concept in this area: Spivak's 'strategic essentialism.' Or what is elsewhere called by Elleke Boehmer the cunning recycling of universal stories (1998, 21). Or even what, prior to all of this, Nwoga said of the idea of negritude; that it was a 'useful lie' (1976, 15).

Like Bhabha's discussion of hybridity, Spivak's comments on strategic essentialism have been easily reduced to aphorism and to substitute phrasings. At least as I understand it, the idea of the strategic employment of universal or essentialist narratives and names in her work is not about a deconstructivist attempt to found an alternative politics - 'Deconstruction cannot found a political program of any kind' (Spivak, 1990, 104) - nor about simply a random choice of label under which some fragile solidarity is temporarily achieved. It is rather, based in a dual recognition: the fact that, firstly, all collective action *necessarily* coalesces around a signifier of identity. The term 'strategic', then, is easily misread because Spivak uses

precisely the control which states exercise over borders that defines international migration as a distinctive social process.' (1996, 130)

it not to imply a decision to act, temporarily, as essentialists, but rather to recognise the unavoidable nature of such a move in any mobilised political action:

[S]ince it is not possible not to be an essentialist, one can self-consciously use this irreducible moment of essentialism as part of one's strategy. (1990, 109)

The second part of her point, of course, is an insistence on the awareness that all such labels of identity act catachrestically, that they involve the sublimation of differences beneath a mark of putative unity. So the term 'strategic', relates as much to a constant awareness of this reduction as it does to the trajectory of particular political action. Spivak offers various examples of this process including one that will become relevant as we turn to Fanon, the history of narratives of nationhood during decolonisation, and how such symbols of unity began to be read in a literal and orthodox manner, rather than with a retained awareness of their strategic nature. In the long run this produced only further oppressions, particularly of what she terms the gendered subaltern subject, at the hands of a comprador bourgeoisie. In a more autobiographical example, discussing the limits of the canon, she addresses her Stanford students:

[Y]our solution [which is] to enlarge the curriculum is in fact a continuation of the neocolonial production of knowledge although in practice I am with you, because on the other side are real racists. The fact that this battle should be won does not mean at all that winning it does not keep a Euroamerican centrism intact. (1990, 159)

What remains apparently unspoken in all of this, however, is the basis on which such strategic choices are made. Going over the same ground again in a different interview Spivak says:

[S]omething unifying is needed [...] as a necessary theoretical fiction which is a methodological presupposition. But the possibility of this fiction *cannot be derived from a true account of things*. (1990, 136, my italics)

We are, it seems to me at this point, back with Said's dilemma over where representation ends and reality begins. In a reversed fashion, this is exactly the same problem of how the purely fictitious can ever be enabling in relation to reality. Spivak and Said present, here, two side of the same impossible coin. If, as the former appears to suggest, these strategic fictions are always wholly, or always equally fictional, on what basis is it possible to choose between them? How is it possible to explain *why* the narrative of the anti-racist is preferable to the narrative of the racist, why that of the anti-colonialist is more acceptable than that of the colonialist without, at some point, accepting the term 'truth'? It is not just that they are competing accounts of the world. Because the former rely on an assumed silence they are, qualitatively, less true than the latter (see Werbner, 1997a,). In this respect, Lazarus' critique of Spivak is entirely valid:

The central problem with Spivak's theorisation of subalternity is that in its relentless and one-sided focus on the problematics of representation as reading, it continues to displace or endlessly defer the *epistemological question* - that concerning truth. (1999a, 114)

We must recognise a danger in the otherwise very necessary term 'strategic'. 'Strategic essentialism' is one thing, but it is much less easy to imagine 'strategic love' say, or 'strategic truth' in a manner which does not make a lie of these concepts.

Bourdieu is valuable at this point, because although he has examined as closely as any recent theorist the strategic nature of choices in the 'game' of culture, he foregrounds at all times the fact that the identity which individuals claim - place a stake in - has for them the nature of an ontological fact (1984, 245 forwards).

[W]hat individuals and groups invest in the particular meaning they give to common classificatory systems by the use they make of them is infinitely more than their 'interest' in the usual sense of the term; it is their whole social being, everything which defines their own idea of themselves, the primordial tacit contract by which they define 'us' as opposed to 'them'[,] (1984, 478)

Therefore, the idea of simply adopting identities, or of being continually aware of their strategic use, is a possibility limited at best to those whose dominance materially (access to the correct social props in terms of language codes, ideological resources and tangible costumes) and in terms of the hierarchy of distinction, gives them a sense of distancing from the urgency of the game. This means distance from necessity in its economic sense, but also from all the impinging history of the constitution of classes and groups, reified into institutions, codified in linguistic practice and, on a personal level, into bodily hexis; this ability *not* to need to invest all of one's social being into an identity is the exclusive property of those with the highest levels of all forms of capital and therefore a further compounding mark of their distinction. In short, the ability to 'know how to play the game of culture *as a game*' (1984, 330, my italics), to be reflexively self-aware of strategy, is itself a mark of dominance in that game. Bourdieu, of course, is analysing class differentiation, whereas Spivak's comments are firstly levelled at the adoption of the national name and image. Even in this context, however, we might recall that section in his *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (1965a [1959]) where Fanon discusses the choice that faced Algerian radio listeners between the broadcasts of official stations and the jammed signals of the Voice of Algeria. What Fanon insists upon is that in this context the idea of a cold, objective decision is impossible, and that what governed the choice between 'the enemy's congenital lie' (87) and the people's assertion of the existence of a radio station they could barely pick up, was the '*felt reality*' (95) of the national struggle. I return to this more fully in the following chapter.

Let me give a parallel example of the idea of strategic identity by looking at Stuart Hall's essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora.' (1994) Ahmad has argued, drawing on an earlier debate between Hall and Sivanandan, that the former's work is

marked by an irresolvable tension between cultural materialism and the influence of the semiotic and poststructuralist revolution of the 60s and 70s.

The two strands of Hall's argument remained causally and structurally separate because they belonged to two irreconcilable strands in Hall's own intellectual frame. (1999, 15)

Hall's essay in question is an examination of the fraught issue we are dealing with here. It asks, in the context of an African diaspora, how ideas of identity might be reconciled with those of difference. His attempt to make this negotiation suggests that Ahmad's diagnosis is not wholly without basis. So, he begins by referring to the matter in terms of lived experience, of actual shared histories and resources on the one hand, real divergences in space and place on the other. But in order, he says, 'to capture this sense of difference which is not pure 'otherness'' (1994, 397) there is a drop to the level of theory and, in particular, to Derrida's term 'différance'. Having described the poststructural chain of deferral, the incompleteness and instability of meaning in language, he is forced to ask the crucial question: 'Where, then, does identity come in to this infinite postponement of meaning?' (397) After noting that 'Derrida does not help as much as he might here' (397) he argues that we may find a moment of identity by enacting a random halt in this endless deferral. The language he uses is already familiar to us from Spivak:

[I]f signification depends upon the endless repositioning of its differential terms, meaning, in any specific instance, depends upon the contingent and arbitrary stop - the necessary and temporary 'break' in the infinite semiosis of language. This does not detract from the original insight. It only threatens to do so if we mistake this 'cut' of identity - this *positioning*, which makes meaning possible - as a natural and permanent, rather than arbitrary and contingent 'ending' - whereas I understand every such position as 'strategic' and arbitrary, in the sense that there is no permanent equivalence between the particular sentence we close, and its true meaning, as such. (397)¹¹

¹¹ See, in agreement with much of what Hall argues, Carol Boyce Davies on the dangers of 'unicentric' logics of identity, whether colonialist or Afrocentric (1999, 96-109). This discussion has its historical context of course, in this case the debate over black British identity during the breakdown of the race

The justification for this lengthy quote is that it makes apparent the fact that for Hall a similar dilemma - how can a deconstructivist position admit of common identity - seeks resolution in similar terminology: in the contingent, the strategic. His subsequent discussion of three particular positionings of diasporan identity is powerful, but does not erase fully the sense that something remains unresolved. This is really the point that is raised in this section. The language here is of a watchful and pre-meditated, if unavoidable involvement in universalising stories, the conscious assumption of monikers of identity. There is, firstly, a logical aporia here: if the chain of deferral admits moments of contingent closure and cohered meaning, where, on the other side of that manoeuvre, is the deferral?

Secondly, if identity is a matter of an 'arbitrary' break, why are some identities preferable to others, why do some occupy positions of greater strength than others, and how do we conceive of ethical decisions about our identities given their apparent randomness? Thirdly, and more importantly, what does it mean in practice to employ cultural formations 'strategically', and for whom is this a plausible possibility? It is not just that this appears to change the terms of relationship with cultural formations, including all forms of community and class, to a distanced and utilitarian employment. But rather, as Bourdieu argues, that such a distanced and objective relation to identity *is itself a mark of distinction*, a disinvestment symbolising the degree to which the subject has room for manoeuvre. In this respect we can see more clearly why the elite migrant appears a figure with such cachet.

All of this is, of course, too broad and too complex to be concluded in any manner here. Difference *is* subsumed under such labels as 'the nation', so that these terms have become the means for a comfortable continuation of old oppressions,

consensus, and in the face of the increasingly essentialised 'ethnic' images projected onto immigrant

especially of women, as Kandiyoti argues (1994). Fanon's explanation of why this occurs is presented below, but suffice to say here that he did not see it as an inevitable consequence of using a unifying label or name in itself. But to repeat, there *is* an importance in the naming of things. To describe our relationship with a particular struggle or narrative as 'strategic' inevitably alters the form of that relationship. As Mauss recognised in respect of economic transaction, there is an absolute polarity between exchange which is unspoken and assumed and that which is verbalised and strategic.¹² The same, surely, applies to our investment in cultural labels. As Malik (1996, 1-19) and others have argued, there are limits to the project of deconstructing identities and a point at which such a project becomes politically impeding. Both Said, by his own admission, and Hall, have difficulty bringing together a materialist and a discursive strand of analysis. Indeed these remain the wires which cannot touch in much of postcolonial criticism. To extend the metaphor then, we might envisage the figure of the migrant on the one hand, the use of the term 'strategic' and its substitutes on the other, as a kind of earth flex between these two. That is to say, the means by which this criticism touches ground, seeks to relate to the existence of actual political struggle. Said's image of the migrant *as the extension into the metropole* of third world politics certainly implies this, as does Jameson's discussion of third world literature already cited. The danger that I want to point out however, is that there is another form of earthing which involves the safe channelling of charge, the conducting of energy out of the circuit. There is always the potential, or rather *dis-potential*, that in using the image of the migrant or the idea of the strategic as a means

communities during the Thatcher years (e.g. Hall, 2000, 127-129).

¹² We might also note that he equates the former to the distribution of value in a non-alienated and communal fashion, whereas the latter comes into play with the possibility of alienated property in private hands. The link between Mauss' concept of gift relations and Bourdieu's attempt to recognise those forms of contemporary social relationship which are not a matter of conscious calculation is important.

to relate to material situations, postcolonial theory earths itself in a way that is disempowering.¹³

Fanon and nationalism.

It is possible to witness something of this earthing in the readings of Fanon by current theorists. This is hardly an original observation and the argument is clearly made by Cedric Robinson in his essay: 'The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon.' He makes a statement that relates well to the work by Hall just discussed:

[I]n the academic terrain occupied by Gates and Spivak, the text is everything [...] Thus, the search for the *real* Fanon takes Gates from interpretative text to the next text, from one clever exposition to its more clever critique. Fanon is what occurs as whatever moment one intercepts the daisy chain. (1993, 87)

The attempt in what follows to recover something like the full implication of Fanon's discussions of one particular foundationalist story - that of nationalism - is therefore nothing unique, Lazarus makes the case more fully (1990, 1-44; 1993; 1999a, 68-143) but it is germane to the current discussion. The amputation of Fanon's more revolutionary writing, including his stark recognition of the necessity of violence, is absolutely central to so much of his current reception.¹⁴

Firstly, Fanon insists on economics. Even in *Black Skin, White Masks*, (1967 [1952]) which Bhabha reads, not without justification, as an examination of the 'colonial identity and its vicissitudes' (Bhabha, 1994, 45) we find this extraordinary preliminary statement:

The analysis I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails

¹³ As is discussed in the next chapter, Spivak has herself been in the forefront of pointing out the potential danger in the valorisation of the 'new immigrant.'

¹⁴ This is something that Moore-Gilbert and his co-authors recognise in their introduction to the field of postcolonial theory and its key figures (1997, 12-15).

an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: - primarily, economic; - subsequently, the internalisation - or, better, the epidermilization - of this inferiority. (1967, 10-11)

The epidermilization of economic inferiority, the cultural reading of economics through biology. However much his fantastic and digressive account is about the processes of othering, paranoia and narcissism, he returns to economic facts more often than he is given credit for. Robinson argues that this work is flawed in making a universalisation of the existential crisis of one particular class: the national bourgeoisie. This group, being both materially and historically dependent on the white coloniser for their existence flounder in that mix of imitation and self-disgust which Fanon (mistakenly) extends to the colonised subject at large. (Robinson, 1993, 82-84)

Yet, even accepting this critique we still continually find Fanon making qualifications such as the following:

The negro problem does not resolve itself into the problems of Negroes living among white men but rather of Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white. (Fanon, 1967, 202)

Rather than view *Black Skin, White Masks* as an examination of the fraught and always incomplete projects of colonial subject formation, we can see under the surface and in the light of his later writings, that it is a book in which he is continually negotiating the relationship between culture and economics. His anger at Sartre, for example, for the latter's recuperation of negritude into a traditional modes of production narrative is not based on a wholesale rejection of that narrative itself. It was, after all, one of Fanon's last statements in relation to the progress of African decolonisation that: 'We must once again come back to the Marxist formula.' (1967a [1964], 187 f.) His point vis-à-vis Sartre is two-fold. Firstly, that to appropriate a specific struggle (to call negritude the first step to class consciousness) may be to

disempower it at the very time when its existence is most necessary. So he talks with bitterness about finding that: '[I]t is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me [...] I *needed* not to know.' (1967, 134-5) This is a note of caution to both a Marxist teleology that fails to account for its European bias, and, in the context of the foregoing, to any critical position that labels a narrative 'strategic' but expects it to remain politically effective.

Secondly, however, his point is that: 'Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man.' (1967, 138) We cannot understand this comment outside of his earlier statement of blackness as a mark of economic lack. In other words, his rebuttal of Sartre is itself, in some respects, a confirmation of an economic argument, just such a stretching of Marxism as he later advocates. A recognition that class, for the black man in the face of the white gaze, has an irreducibly corporeal aspect. Bourdieu's concept of bodily hexis relates something of the same. Because all of this is couched in the writings of Diop and Césaire it is, also, about cultural attempts to come to terms with a lived experience whose first, crucial term is an economic one. What Fanon later argues is that such cultural re-imaginings can achieve only a poor consolation without corresponding material re-distribution.

So it is no surprise to find that more than anything else *The Wretched of the Earth* is marked by a focus on the materiality of what is at stake in the struggle for independence. Even in the concluding section, in which he returns to the terrain of psychopathology familiar from his earlier work, he insists on these facts of 'hard reality' (to dredge up that slogan again) as the reproof to arguments of the criminal propensity in North Africans:

The relations of man with matter, within the world outside and with history are in the colonial period simply relations with food. (Fanon, 1965 [1961], 249)

When he famously states that ‘Europe is literally the creation of the Third World’ (1965, 81) he is making a brute economic point such as Walter Rodney later expanded (1972) rather than a statement about cultural self-image. Most importantly, when he endorses the struggle for nationhood his justification lies in a recognition of its economic necessity.¹⁵ It is a struggle which is strategic only in this sense.

The whole of the crucial chapter on the pitfalls of national consciousness circles around this insistent materialism. Where the rhetoric of new nations degrades to chauvinism, racism and a brutal form of repressive nationalism, this is not because the narrative of national identity must always reveal this exclusive side, but because it will always do so where the independence that is won is purely formal. Where, in other words, the ‘colony’s economy [...] is still organized in order to complete the economy of the different mother countries.’ (1965, 127) In this context, in which he talks so scathingly about the local ruling class setting up its country as ‘the brothel of Europe’ (1965, 123), fundamentalist nationalism emerges. For Fanon is not outside of history, he saw this process in action all around him. As Caute’s short biography (1970) reminds us, he had witnessed the moment when ‘African unity takes off the mask, and crumbles into regionalism inside the hollow shell of nationality itself.’ (Fanon, 1965, 128) So, non-repressive nationalism is inextricably linked up with genuine independence from any form of neocolonial control, from that economic subservience which Lenin predicted. For Fanon, such a form of nationalism is inherently tied up with the development of greater material equality across the new

¹⁵ Timothy Brennan has recently warned against the degree to which the sociological study of nationalism has become ‘[f]ascinated by the narrative layerings and polysemic ambiguities of political myth[.]’ (2001, 82) This focus emerges in cultural studies to the exclusion of any recognition that the

society. The nationalism that Fanon envisaged was synonymous with social consciousness (1965, 162-3), and entailed the desacrilizing of both the leadership and the capital (1965, 135-7)¹⁶ and the existence of something like a localised democracy.

Out of all of this, Fanon produces a conception of national culture which is equally uncompromising in its emphasis on economic equality, and it is here I suggest, that he is such an important writer in a field of discourse focused work and images of historical oppression which finds it possible to argue, for example:

Colonialism is not a unitary project but a fractured one, riddled by contradictions and exhausted as much by its own internal debates as by the resistance of the colonized.' (Thomas, 1994, 51)

Fanon, for his part, is scathing about the idea that resistance is primarily cultural:

No colonial system draws its justification from the fact that the territories it dominates are culturally non-existent [...] To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the popular struggle.' (1965, 179, 187)

What is importantly signalled here is that, firstly, the cultural arena which interests Fanon is popular in its basis and reception.¹⁷ Secondly, and in a moment that is reminiscent of Gramsci, that we cannot easily separate these new cultural forms from the struggle for independence itself and indeed from that necessary violence he discusses in the book's initial section.¹⁸ So the cultural arena itself *is* irretrievably

rise of nations is primarily a history of the development of state controlled management of populations, and with economic, not narratological requirements (2001, 75-84).

¹⁶ A point which suggests that Chinua Achebe's insistence on the failure of the Nigerian leadership as root cause of his country's difficulties is true in as much as he is disgusted at their extravagance, but wrong in its assumption that alternative incumbents would redeem the office (Achebe, 1983).

¹⁷ In terms of African literature at least, relatively recent work by writers like Darah and Barber goes some way to correcting the previous critical focus on what Ngugi had termed Afro-European literature, i.e. writing by Africans in English (1986, 27). This is to some extent a focus which this thesis is guilty in continuing. That said, what is also reflected in this fact is a question of access to African writing in the west and the way in which these channels of distribution and market access determine what is accessible to the non-local reader.

¹⁸ We might recall, for example, Gramsci's insistence that the struggle for a new culture is not for a merely new *form* of art. Instead, in as much as it involves the struggle between opposing groups for hegemonic control, genuinely new culture (in the limited, literary sense) will only emerge in the context of a new culture (in the broadest sense of a new social formation) (Gramsci, 1985, 98).

material and related to - both born in and expressive of - the struggle between groups.¹⁹ Hence Fanon hoped that the violence of the struggle was not just about a cathartic response to that brutality which underlay the colonial order, militarily and psychologically²⁰ but that it would also prove to be about exposing the cultural attempts of the bourgeois class to co-opt the movement to their own ends:

The action which has thrown them into a hand-to-hand struggle confers upon the masses a *voracious taste for the concrete*. The attempt at mystification becomes, in the long run, practically impossible. (1965, 74 - my italics)

A voracious taste for the concrete in the face of an attempted mystification that focuses too exclusively on the recovery of cultural dignity. This, in many respects, is the lesson that makes a return to the full corpus of Fanon's writing so vital for theory in the context of neocolonialism. His staunch position is that before any kind of cultural discussion is possible, there must be material equality. That the first co-ordinate of identity under capitalism is not cultural but is related to the position within an order of production. Because of his focus on this economic plane Fanon recognises that the nation is not simply a narrative or imagining of joint identity but related to such political facts as an independent government and the potential to control the allocation of resources in a more even fashion. It is this focus that negotiates the relation between representation and the real in his work. The label of the nation will only come to be dangerously exclusive if it falls fully into the hands of the comprador ruling class. While it is read against the question of material equality in the new order it will remain something very different from its old European template. Cultural nationalism, where the cultural is synonymous with a struggle for social equality, need not become what Appiah fears it must: the making real of imperially

¹⁹ By way of example, Watson, 1998, on material culture in colonial Ibadan.

²⁰ Fanon later noted with sadness the speed with which independent states who had achieved their status politically seemed to seek out 'a real battlefield with wounds and destruction' (1967a, 187).

imposed divisions (Appiah, 1992, chapter 3). The position is more recently repeated by Arif Dirlik (1990, 394-431).

Fanon was equally sceptical about the idea of cultural hybridity when argued against the background of colonial capitalism's inequalities. The two zones of the colonised world, he insisted, 'are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity.' (1965, 30) It is revealing then, that recent re-formulations of the concept - the jettisoning of binaries of opposition and the rejection of closed categories - for all their claims to being radical theory, may serve very conservative ends. As an example I might cite a recent essay by Olakunle George in which the author attacks Ngugi wa Thiong'o, not for his rejection of English, but because he makes the assumption that by returning to Kikuyu he is somehow returning to a unitary, non-hybrid culture. In distinction to this 'eminently vulnerable' (1997, 80) position, George opposes Fagunwa whose work, it is argued, immanently acts out the confusions and muddiness of lived life. Under just such an idea of 'complexity' as Brennan sees to be the new badge of engagement, then, Ngugi is not dismissed but certainly misread. The crucial and unmentioned point in the Kenyan writer's epoch-making argument is, revealing his debt to Fanon, one of audience. Or, as he titles the final chapter in *Decolonising the Mind*, a 'quest for relevance'. The African author has been taught to misrecognise who they are writing *for*:

What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition[.] (Ngugi, 1986, 26-7)

This is the crux of Ngugi's position and what motivates his rejection of English. When George points out that there is no such thing as a non-hybrid tradition he may be right, but in doing so he evades the central populist thrust of what is being said. It is a misreading not unlike those which Fanon himself has been subject to, and

suggests that in the dismissal of such apparently naive propositions as that of a unitary culture, postcolonial theory may be missing something of greater import.²¹

All of this will no doubt appear a long way from the migrant. In fact Fanon says much that is valuable on the topic and a great deal that remains relevant. His discussion of the ‘magic vault of distance’ (1967, 23) that surrounds the ‘been-to’ traveller is crucial and relates to the discussion presented later in chapter five. The returning expatriate, he says, will ‘convey the impression that they have completed a cycle, that they have added to themselves something that was lacking. They return literally full of themselves.’ (1967, 19 f.) Ahmad’s statement on the enshrining of the migrant position in postcolonial theory argues that something of the same symbolic charge is still bestowed on those who leave home:

[T]he figure of the migrant, especially the migrant (postcolonial) intellectual residing in the metropolis, comes to signal a universal condition of hybridity and is said to be the Subject of Truth that the individuals living within their cultures do not possess. (1995, 13)

The ‘Truth’ that is apparently available to the expatriate, of course, is an awareness of the contingency of things, cultural and otherwise. What Fanon reminds us, however, is that this Truth and its bearer, this recognition of the strategic nature of our conceptions and communal labels, may itself present more of a false consciousness than the exclusionary categories of nation and class. When Nigerian Marxist Omafume Onoge calls for a return to the ‘combative tradition’ of cultural nationalism

²¹ On the back cover of Brenann’s *At Home in the World* (1997) Said is quoted commending the fact that the author is ‘attuned to the enormous changes in global culture that have left behind traditional labels or categories like nationalism, literary style, and culture itself; he reveals how the transformation of the global economy, the dependency of new nations, the hybridity of national culture has given rise to a new cosmopolitanism that necessitates plastic, dynamic interpretations of such things as the publishing industry, local traditions and markets as they interact with media conglomerates, critical theory and the literary career.’ These comments, which amount almost to a photo-negative of the book’s actual argument, have presumably arrived on the jacket through some kind of pre-production mistake rather than deliberate misreading. Nevertheless, what they demonstrate is that this perspective on the situation of such categories as the nation is all but hegemonic in the field, to the extent that

(1995, 12)²² he does so in the context, as he points out, of the budgets of supposedly independent nations being vetoed by the IMF, economic policy prescribed by the World Bank, and of the extraordinary leverage over domestic policies enabled by debt conditionality. Identity does have an oppositional quality. But if we read this not just as an effect of language but in the light of the current formations of capital, it ceases to be a simply negative fact. As JanMohamed has it in relation to minority identity, it becomes a means of negating a prior negation, becomes a crucial self-affirmation. (JanMohamed and Lloyd, 1990, 102-123)²³ Tigers, Soyinka famously argued, do not need to proclaim their nature as tigers. And, as Chinweizu et al retorted (rather misreading Soyinka's position as an attack on cultural nationalism): 'Even tigers must know when to put themselves in a fighting mood and pounce together to prevent their being ambushed and shot down.' (1980, 207) What remains missing, perhaps, from the determined affirmations of these writers is Fanon's recognition that genuine cultural nationalism cannot be detached from the fight for economic equality.

Nor is the later conception that narratives of identity are never wholly closed or finished what is at issue here, because primary is the question of economic independence. Prior to that we should be as scathing about the focus on cultural hybridity, in whatever sense, as Fanon was himself.²⁴ An insistence on the non-

alternative possibilities become unspeakable, at least in such significant marketing spaces as book jackets.

²² One recalls a comment from Canclini: 'There are really two types of ethnocentrism in the process of capitalist unequal exchange: an imperial ethnocentrism, which, through the multinationalization of economy and culture, tends to destroy any social organization that turns out to be useless to its interests, and the ethnocentrism of oppressed nations, classes, and *etinas* (ethnic enclaves) that can free themselves only through the emphatic self-affirmation of their economic sovereignty and cultural identity.' (1993 [1989], 9)

²³ It is no coincidence that JanMohamed's example, the work of writing of Richard Wright, is also used in this context by Fanon. (1967, 35) See also his introduction from the same volume (with Lloyd, 1990) in which there is a discussion of much that is relevant here, including the postmodern celebration of difference where cultures have been disconnected from the original acts of struggle which give them meaning.

²⁴ In the remarkable essay: 'North African Syndrome' (1967a, 3-16) Fanon enacts as much as states his rejection of hybridity. Through the initial pages of the work he plays with voice, mimicking the tone and attitude of white medical prejudice, satirising it but also inhabiting it. Through the mesh of voices

closable nature of identity, especially national identity, comes too close to a parallel with the position of multinational capital for which the limitations of state control are increasingly an impediment (Harris, 1998; Lazarus, 1998-9; Amin, 1998). The Truth that the migrant intellectual in this categorical sense is supposed to have access to is precisely the truth that the international division of labour requires, a proclamation of the death of 'simple' binaries of opposition. (Hoogvelt, 1997, 153-161) As Nwala argues, the loss of economic independence rarely takes place without ideological buttressing (1980. See also Kodjo in the same volume). Brennan poses the crucial question:

How is it possible to divorce the near unanimity in humanistic theory of the tropes of traversing, being between, migrating, and so forth from the climate created by the "global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture"? (1997, 18)

A final lesson from Fanon then, to reiterate the point. Speaking to the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in September 1956, Fanon gave an incredible and prescient account of the development of the relationship between culture and racism, exploitation and ideology:

There is first affirmed the existence of human groups having no culture; then of a hierarchy of cultures; and finally, the concept of cultural relativity. (1967a, 31)

He traces the way in which increasingly complex forms of exploitation require this scale of increasingly complex ideological explanation.

The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence of the forms of racism' (35)

Fanon creates, initially, a hybrid text in just Bhabha's sense of the word, where one voice merges with another and is reliant upon it for its own address. And yet, decisively, his schizophrenic voicing ends when he moves to the allocation of blame. In a brief, abrupt moment he offers us the coloniser's disbelieving refusal of guilt, twists it and then finally and certainly claims his own voice: 'but anyway, you can't say that it's our fault. - But that's just it, it *is* our fault. It so happens that the fault is YOUR fault.' (14)

What he ends by saying however, and this underscores the point made earlier, is that talk of the relativity of cultures, of their contingent nature is not false *in itself*, but is false, is (perhaps unintentionally) mystifying when it takes place against the background of on-going exploitation. It is only when this whole brutal conjunction is irrevocably ended that we might begin to discuss ‘the reciprocal relativism of different cultures.’ (1967a, 44)

Conclusion.

The migrant as a figure of liminality emerges as a wandering stranger in the text of Arnold Van Gennep, making a territorial passage across the geographic spaces between groups. What Van Gennep remarks, and what Levi-Strauss (1969, chapter 5) later developed, is that these charged zones were also the sites of ‘marketplaces or battlefields’ (Van Gennep, 1960, 18). This is really the cue that I want to take for what follows: that in thinking about migrancy and, in particular, the migrant in the field of cultural production, it is crucial to focus on the material motivations and consequences of such journeys. We should recognise the passage in terms of its economic and status repercussions as much as the questions it poses for our imagined communities and projects of cultural identity. We need, further, to accept the possibility that there may be peculiar forms of blindness as well as vision that are available to the expatriate. What Onoge argued 25 years ago in relation to Senghor remains important in the context of this study:

[W]e must perforce thank France, Britain and the other imperialists for giving birth to the ‘cultural half-castes’, who, with their double vision, can now play the diplomatic role of building the *Civilisation of the Universal!* (1974a, 30)²⁵

²⁵ See also Maja-Pearce, adopting the same term in relation to the language debate: ‘Cultural Half-Castes’ (1985).

And, as he continues:

[Writers in Africa] are in a more favourable position for developing a clarity of vision than their counterparts in diaspora. The race-class problematic, whose concrete salience for Africans in diaspora complicates the burdens of the struggle in the Americas, is necessarily abstract on the homeland. (43)

The thematic of migrancy lends itself to such current concepts as ‘de-territorialization’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) and tends against such concepts as class which tend to invoke residence and employ oppositional notions of power. It is a motif that foregrounds, then, those aspects of our lives and self-understandings that are narrated, that are imaginative rather than those which relate to material institutions and economics. What Fanon and here Onoge, forcefully tell us, is that in many ways migrancy is more, not less involved with class, that the access to travel is itself a form of capital, and that all culture is inextricably bound up with economic questions. If we develop a theory that reads the de-territorialization of migrancy literally, one that makes of the phenomenon a justification for a de-materialised view of culture then we are, particularly in the context of the international division of labour, in danger of adding only another chapter to the whole ‘fragmented and bloody history’ (Fanon, 1967a, 31) of the Western ideological justification for oppression.

Chapter 3: Migrancy, Alienation and Cultural Work.

I have, in the two chapters previous to this discussed the enthronement of the migrant intellectual as an extension, at least in part, of the romantic self-image of the artist, and seen latterly how this position of the artist in exile or as expatriate becomes, as it were, a means to resolve the dilemma of recent theory and conclude the search for a space from which some critique might be launched or solidarity forged. The following offers both a recapitulation of this position and attempts to make some initial gestures towards a sketch of an alternative model of the position of the migrant intellectual.

Writing, labour and the Nigerian field of cultural production.

It might be useful to begin by returning briefly to a text we encountered earlier, Ben Okri's collection of essays and aphorisms, *A Way of Being Free*. In the first part of 'The Joys of Storytelling' (1997, 29-48) Okri provides a moment which is salient both in terms of position and theme. The memory he restages for us occurs on board a ship in the mid-Atlantic. Okri's narrative is thus immediately situated in that charged space of the in-between which has been such a focus for postcolonial theory. Here it is, while watching a magician perform for an audience of passengers that he has the realisation, and it is an entirely appropriate epiphany for this liminal region, that 'the old storytellers were the first real explorers and frontierspeople of the abyss.' (39) Out of this insight, which is once again related to Soyinka's theoretical writing, he goes on to begin his unfolding of the writer's vocation.

What is important here is not just the fact that this brief snippet of recounted biography repeats the convocation of themes we found together in the foregoing

sections - migrancy, storytelling, vision - but that it should remind us that to privilege the 'migrant author' involves the making special, the valorising, of *both* terms in the phrase. In other words, to describe certain trajectories in recent theory as a form of new romanticism is to highlight not just the privileging of migrancy, but also that this rides beside the continued privileging of the category of the writer itself, more broadly of the producer of high cultural forms. Certainly this is the case in Said, who lays his admiration for the products of individual intellectual activity openly on the table, but also to an extent in those critics whose work, overlapping with cultural studies or postmodernism, we might expect to be less respectful of the demarcations of the cultural field.¹ The rise of postcolonial theory does not seem to mark a particular break with the orthodoxy which holds that artistic or literary work is in some absolute sense different to other types of production. Nor does it challenge the inculcated sense that there is something vaguely distasteful in the equation of the 'work of culture' with paid work in the everyday usage of the word. Okri makes it clear that he sees the storyteller's calling as something special and unique, and although he later extends this power of life-altering vision to the dispossessed of the world it is the poet or writer who remains cultural point-man or point-woman: the scout, the 'frontiersperson.'

We have noted the often unspoken assumption that the terms 'writer' and 'migrant' have a peculiar fit, that their drawing together in theory is the result of something like an ontological valency. The vision of one (say the exile in Said) becomes a neat extension of the vision of the other. Although there are important

¹ Flicking through the index of one of the most familiar readers in the area, Williams and Chrisman's 'Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory' (1994), we find that among the constituent elements filtered out in the distillation process of compiling an index, there are (diluted in references to theoretical writers at a ratio of about 4 to 1) the names of 16 novelists, 11 poets, and a couple of essayists plus three film directors.

differences between their fictional writing² something of the link between Okri and Soyinka is apparent in the latter's essay 'New Frontiers for Old' in which he argues along exactly these lines:

I have come to a more than mild suspicion that there are few creative terrains more congenial to the writer [...] than the frontier. (Soyinka, 1993, 217)

The magnetism between the two terms takes on the appearance of a natural relationship, call it perhaps an elective affinity between writing and exile as is argued elsewhere by Michael Seidel (1986).³ It is a correlation, as has already been pointed out, implied in much romantic theory itself and later in modernism.

What this chapter will go on to argue is that there is, in fact, an important link between the privileging of cultural work and the more recent privileging of the migrant, but that to take this at face value, to accept it on the terms of its own ideology, as a mutual relationship between unique vocation and unique vision, is too simple. Rather, what a materialist take on the migrant writer needs to begin with, and this is hardly a surprising move, is a recognition that the work of the writer cannot, simply by declaring itself to exist in an elevated realm, actually carve a location outside of the marketplace. The poet, to paraphrase Marx, cannot merely will away the fact that they produce, in the final analysis, commodities, and that they remain therefore, 'paid wage-labourers.' Bourdieu's careful analysis of the 'conquest of

² Soyinka's use of the tropes of Yoruba myth make him a much less approachable writer for the western reader than Okri, hence, for example, Timothy Brennan's refusal to categorise him as a 'cosmopolitan.' This is perhaps a little misleading because there can have been few writers who have been as eclectic in their work as Soyinka, whose adaptation of Euripides and use of the Orpheus myth as backcloth to *Season of Anomy* demonstrate his incorporative attitude. What is certainly true however, is that there is a sense of sitedness in Soyinka's writing and focus, critically and fictionally, on Nigerian concerns and thematics which is absent in Okri's later writings. The two writers do certainly share a certain political point of view, especially in relation to the question of what consolation or even witness art offers in the face of, for example, urban poverty. Contrast in this respect *The Interpreters* with *Dangerous Love* or *Flowers and Shadows*. See chapter four for further discussion.

³ In the introduction to a recent volume on the question of exile and African literature Eldred Jones makes the following argument: '[I]t is the internal distancing of the individual from the environment

autonomy' for the field of cultural production traces two things simultaneously. On the one hand, the winning of an independence for art that *is* genuine in terms of the inverted logic by which the field operates, but on the other, an independence which is wholly illusory in as much as the field is still structured by its superimposition within the broader arena of power relations, and by the fact that the game is still played for a stake of capital which, whatever its achieved form, is finally convertible back into the economic. The 'charismatic legitimation' (Bourdieu, 1993, 51) of the author as a special presence was, as Bourdieu notes, a move initiated by romanticism, and one which is still being re-inscribed by Okri. What the former goes on to elucidate however, is that it remains part of the camouflage for the retreat of art.

It is not just the mid-ocean siting of Okri's vocational epiphany that is notable. There is an irony that it should occur, as it does, in front of the conjurations of a magician. Discussing the 'collective misrecognition' of the stakes of the game in cultural production Bourdieu had drawn on Mauss' description of exactly the same figure:

[T]he magician's power, of which the miracle of the signature or personal trademark is merely an outstanding example, is a *valid imposture*, a legitimate abuse of power, collectively misrecognized and so recognized. The artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act[.] (1993, 81)

A magic act indeed but not, as the quote exposes, sufficiently potent to make real the claim that art makes of itself: that its production is of a qualitatively different nature to the rest of the commodity market. Writing, as Macherey reminds us, is still labour. It is a specific form of work of course, and one carried out upon special materials and employing its own technique. This is what gives it specificity but also what means

that frequently produces art. When physical alienation is introduced, the creative art may even be intensified.' (2000, vii)

that it still has a relation to broader theories of capitalist production. In the particular context of this thesis what opens up with this recognition is the intriguing possibility of seeing migrant writing for what it is: a specific but nevertheless real form of migrant labour. There is a link between the migrant artist and the claim of literary production to be, in some sense, unique. But it is a link that consists perhaps more in the term alienation than in the privileged idea of vision.

To make this apparent it will be valuable to drop back a little and trace something of the history of that field of cultural production which, in the Nigerian context, is the source of migrant cultural work. In other words, I want to look, for a brief moment, at the position of anglophone literature in Nigeria, and in particular at the Nigerian novel. What I am *not* examining here, is popular culture or material in indigenous languages as discussed by Barber (1987, 1-78; 1982, 431-450; 1995, 3-30). Also bracketed outside of this brief study are the remnants of more traditional cultural practices including the oral forms which, as Daraḥ has revealingly examined in his study of Urhobo praise poetry, remain subject to the same pressures of the rising market as any other type of production.⁴ The third exclusion is work in the Arabic tradition which as Abubakre and Reichmuth (1997) and Hunwick (1997) have argued, reveals the extension of another less secular form of globalism within Nigeria. I make these exceptions partly through an admitted lack of knowledge, but primarily because these are not the sub-fields which have given rise to those migrant intellectuals and writers debated in the West. They are not, to put it in Mineke

⁴ Daraḥ's fascinating study which I understand to be on-going (Onoge, personal communication) is available in Gugelberger (1985, 178-192). His work demonstrates how, under pressure of urbanisation and the loss of the traditional social structures which supported it as a cultural practice, Urhobo song-poetry, which had taken a communal and satirical form, began to adopt a more panegyric mode (praise-poetry). This was a form increasingly sought as a cultural commodity whereby the *nouveaux riches* could have their recent capital accumulations mirrored in a sort of immediate commemoration, instant symbolic capital as it were. [See also Jegede, 1987; Lawuyi, 1997a].

Schipper's words, the sites of extraction for those raw materials 'processed in Western-located academic discourse factories[.]' (1997, 136)⁵

Trying to sketch the Nigerian field of literature via Bourdieu, at least within the parameters given above, one fact is immediately apparent. In Bourdieu's particular analysis the autonomy of art exists via the establishment of an inverted logic governing cultural production. That is to say, what prevails is the implicit rule of 'loser wins' whereby the highest symbolic capital accrues to those works which are most avant-garde and most restricted in audience. The ideal of a 'pure aesthetic' becomes the structuring motif of the field as whole, indeed the very logic of its apparently unique game. Bourdieu is, of course, clear in arguing that the apparent absence of an economic stake is precisely that, an absence in appearance only.

Nevertheless, in contrast, the writer of English novels in Nigeria faces *from the first* a massively limited audience, if not in absolute numbers, then certainly taken relative to the Nigerian population. A restriction of readership it is not in any sense a prize to be won. The autonomy that European art fought to achieve confronts the Nigerian writer with all the starkness of its converse face, as severance from readership, as an unwelcome but given circumstance from personal history, as an inheritance of imperial rule and increasingly, as the result of an economy that has collapsed in the neocolonial context. So, for example, an established classic such as *Things Fall Apart*, ubiquitously used as a set text, sold 1693 legitimate copies on the Nigerian domestic market in the last half of 1998. It is possible, of course, that this represents a certain saturation for a familiar text, but less familiar titles such as *Once Upon Four Robbers* and *The Ghost of a Millionaire* sold 78 and 37 copies

⁵ One of the points that all these qualifications make apparent is that Bourdieu's model, extraordinarily nuanced as it already is, would require further complication to take account of cultural production where works are produced not only in different languages but in a context in which, despite an apparent national delimitation, there are various impinging transnational fields of power in operation.

respectively in the same period. The relative scale of these sales is apparent when it is considered that the Nigerian secondary school education populace represents, alone, a potential audience of 4 million.⁶ On a fairly generous estimate the expected sales for a small scale novel release even by a well known publisher like Heinemann, would represent something around 0.0005% of the Nigerian population, well over 40% of which is automatically precluded by illiteracy.⁷ Art for its own sake, in European terms the revolutionary motto of the ‘autonomous principle’ by which the independence of the cultural field was established, sounds in the context of anglophone Nigerian novel fiction a deeply ironic note. It reads, in fact, less like a manifesto call to arms and more like a statement of diagnosis for the position in which those forms of cultural expression inherited from a colonial education system find themselves. As a result even such a conservative writer as Achebe can state with vitriol: ‘Art for art’s sake is just another piece of deodorised dog-shit.’ (1975, 19)

This is a crucial point. Unlike the pamphlet literature disclosed by Beier (1979, 251-280), Obiechina (1972, 1973) and more recently by Newell (1996; 1998a), the forms of African writing which are the origins of migrant cultural labour face from the outset a restricted audience which appears not as the product of a hard fought victory on behalf of culture, but as the poisoned chalice of a colonial inheritance. Anglophone literature in Nigeria and the critical position takings surrounding it have continually struggled with the sense of alienation from local readership. The most obvious expression of this has been the language debate, beginning perhaps with Obianjunwa Wali’s declaration that African fiction in English had written itself into a

⁶ Information courtesy of Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), Ibadan and Macmillan (Nigeria), Lagos.

⁷ Literacy rate: 57.1% (67.3% for men, 47.3% for women). Population, as of July 1999 (estimated) 113,928,587. World factbook on Nigeria. (www.odci.gov/cia/publications/nslo/factbook/ni.htm) Compare, for example, Bourdieu’s analysis of the sales of such restricted releases as *La Jalousie* (Robbe-Grillet) which sells an *initial* figure of 746 copies (Bourdieu, 1996, 143).

dead end (1963). Wali's polemic opened up an issue that reverberated for a long time in the broader African literary world, Ngugi was later to cite it as influential in his decision to refute English (1986, 24-26). In a typical demonstration of the fashion in which the field operates all Nigerian writers have had to take either implicit or explicit positions on the question of language, and more broadly on the key question of the relevance of their particular forms of cultural expression.⁸ The later and well reprised debate between Soyinka and the bolekaja critics also says a great deal about the kind of alienated position in which this form of anglophone African literature finds itself. The vehement argument of Chinweizu and colleagues, at least in its more extended form⁹ speaks *both* of an unsought separation from local readership and of an autonomy yet to be won from imposed western standards of literary style and practice. There are continual statements throughout their work that testify to this double displacement:

African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. (1980, 4)

A writer does have a minimum professional responsibility to make his work relevant and intelligible to his society and its concerns [...] in Africa we recognise that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory upon the artist. (252)

What becomes apparent here is a kind of reversal of the situation Bourdieu describes.

African anglophone writing finds itself existing in many respects as an extension of

⁸ By way of example see: Achebe's attempts to replicate the role of art in the Mbari festival, that is to say, as an indigenous, communal artistic aesthetic (1975, 19-29, 55-62; 1988, 32-43, 95-105; 1990), Tanure Ojaide's relations of his work to the Yoruba Ijala (1992, 43-57), comments by Alkali, Emecheta, Ogunjipe-Leslie, Nwapa in interview with James (1990, 28-32, 34-45, 64-73, 110-117), Omotoso on Achebe and Soyinka as spokesmen of the elite (1996, especially chapter 2), Maja-Pearce on the language question (1985; 1992), Gabriel Okara's defences of the use of English (in response to Wali, 1963; and 1990, 11-18), Okpewho on the contemporary relevance of African myth, (1998); Soyinka's well known retorts and position-takings, e.g. *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), 'The Writer in a Modern African State' (1968), 'Language as Boundary' (1978) and the more recent statement by Obafemi, 'Language, Literature and Democratic Politics in Nigeria' (1999a).

the European field of cultural production. Ngugi suggests as much in describing novels written by Africans in English as 'Afro-European literature' (1986, 27). The autonomy which is fought for in so many position-takings by Nigerian writers is just this, an autonomy from the structuring principles of an alien field. This is absolutely apparent in Achebe's rebuttal of supposedly universal standards of criticism which under examination reveal themselves to be the principles of European critical judgement (1975, 3-18) a thematic taken up by the Chinweizu troika itself (1980, chapter 1)¹⁰ and by the second generation writers of the 'alternative tradition' (Osofisan, 1986). It is apparent also in the long standing debates and attempts by Nigerian writers to incorporate elements of the oral mode into literature and the formation of what has come to be termed orature as a mode whose reference points are local traditions rather than the 'Great Tradition'.¹¹ It is, indeed, apparent even in Soyinka's own riposte to the troika. As Eldred Jones had earlier stated in reference to Soyinka's attacks on negritude: '[H]is work exhibits all that negritude was essentially about, bar the shouting.' (1972, 113) Bourdieu has talked elsewhere about the paradoxical fact that even apparently contrary statements within the field implicitly confirm its emergent logic. Soyinka's famous 'a tiger does not proclaim its tigeritude' comment is a perfect example. Notwithstanding the fact that the bolekaja critics read

⁹ The original debate with Soyinka took place in issue 48 of *Transition* (1975) but the more recent and more lengthy version of their position was published in the 1980's, 1985 in Britain. It incorporates, and to some extent modifies their earlier polemic.

¹⁰ More recently and in the European context, we might add, the discussion by Bourdieu and Wacquant of the universalization of American critical concepts, which they describe much as Achebe had before them, using the term: 'The cunning of imperial reason.' (1999)

¹¹ See specifically in relation to the critique of 'universal critical criteria' or the development of oral-influenced novel forms the following: Rhoad's study of Achebe (1993, 61-72); Anozie's conclusion in his structuralist study of African literature (1981, 249-265); Booth's study of language in Nigerian novels (1981, 57-66 and forwards); Gakwandi's study of the African novel (1977); Irele on the need to develop local critical standards (1971a); Ogude's interesting thesis on the history of African slavery and its relations to current literary occupations (1991, 1-9); Ezeigbo in the same volume on orature (1991, 11-21); Iyasere on 'the legacy of the oral tradition' (1975, 107-119); the volumes of *African Literature Today* dedicated to the language question (17, 1991) and to orature (18, 1992); Abrahams on 'Schweitzerism' in critical work (1981, 10-22); Kirpal on borrowings from traditional art in the modern

his position as an attack on African cultural nationalism, his is precisely a restatement of an independent African aesthetic, such as is worked out in some detail in *Myth, Literature and the African World*.

In short then, unlike the more comfortable syncretism of popular cultural production whose relation to an immediate audience is apparent, the field of anglophone Nigerian literature has been haunted by the difficulty of relevant local expression. The autonomy that the Nigerian anglophone novelist has fought to achieve is that of a freedom from the dictates of a European hegemony and the struggle has consisted in the continual double task of interposing space *against* Western criticism and standards on the one hand, and the development of a more locally valuable form than that of the Western, individual-focused novel narrative on the other.¹²

Alienation and migrant fiction.

This extremely brief analysis of Nigerian literary production already suggests a great deal about how migrant cultural labour comes to exist and function. For the anglophone Nigerian novelist the gravity of the cultural field pulls continually westwards and northwards. It is indeed, as Achebe says:

[A]s though universality were some distant bend in the road which you may take if you travel out far enough in the direction of Europe and

Nigerian novel (1988); Sackey on the same theme (1991); Nwoga on critical criteria (1976, 8-30); Jones (1969, 71-78); and Omari (1985) on the language debate.

¹² The subsequent chapter looks in more detail at some of these themes in relation to the Nigerian novel itself. There is inevitably a certain reduction in such a brief account, it should be noted that a more detailed analysis of the development of Nigerian novel fiction would need to distinguish between the work of the first generation writers for whom the prohibitive complexity of language and referentiality characteristic of some of Soyinka's writing or Okigbo's poetry was not a matter for apology and the later generation who sought, either in line with a specific commitment (Osundare, Emecheta) or in an attempt to popularise the novel (e.g. Iroh), a wider readership in a simpler and more directly communicative style.

America, if you put sufficient distance between you and your home.
(1975, 9)

This is not just a crude use of metaphor but a statement of the actual graining and biases of institutions and material resources. It is more difficult now for Nigerian novelists to find any domestic audience. Local publishing, broken, with much of the rest of the economy, by the rapacity of the Babangida and Abacha regimes, rarely has the capacity to support any release on its own behalf.¹³ According to UNESCO's classifications, 209 'literature' titles were published in Nigeria in 1975, a figure which had declined to a low point of 60 in 1994.¹⁴ The second-hand book trade, thriving on pirated material, offers no real means of support to local writers and, in any case, tends to feed the market for cheap foreign work:

The fact that a large chunk of these second-hand reading materials are of non-Nigerian literature is explained by the dialectics of the market. Entrepreneurs sell what consumers want. Nigerians largely weaned on foreign literature have therefore seen in the second-hand book market a cheaper way of continuing to enjoy their diet of foreign books and authors which an unfavourable exchange rate regime was dictating they abandon. (Mammah, 1999; see also Agyeman-Duah, 2000; Ojaide, 2001)

On the other hand the heyday of western academic and public interest in African writing has waned just as Soyinka predicted it would (Wilkinson, 1992, 92). It is consequently more difficult than it was in the late 60's for contemporary Nigerian writers to gain access to consideration by publishers who might offer an international audience while they remain inside their own country. It is no coincidence that recent Nigerian additions to the Heinemann 'African Writers' list such as Okey Ndibe and Bandele-Thomas are expatriate, or that their recently published work by Oguine (*A Squatter's Tale*) and Emecheta (*The New Tribe*) takes as its theme exiled experience.

¹³ Griswold's recent study into the Nigerian novel 'complex' includes a thorough analysis of this development, tracing the Nigerian novel from its origins with London publishing houses to its brief local renaissance in the 1970's when internal publications temporarily eclipsed imports, and onto the collapse of the 1980's. The contemporary market remains more or less stagnant (2000, 26-119).

Compounding this further is the fact, one which we easily forget, that the means of cultural production have their own ‘grainings’ which in turn reflect upon the use to which they can be put and the material which they can produce. Attending a writers’ workshop in Zaria I heard one poet present explaining how difficult it was for him to construct any written work containing orthography other than that employed in standard English while he was working on an American-made word processor. For him, and others in the group, who were seeking to work closely with aspects of their own local language this gave rise to an aporia: the need to choose between setting out material in such a fashion that it was orthographically correct but too untidy and ‘amateur’ to receive publication,¹⁵ or to abandon the use of this orthography, or substitute some form of transliteration. As another speaker pointed out, those working on longer prosaic pieces encountered a similar problem with spell-check facilities if and when they sought to employ pidgin or ‘rotten’ English, which by definition is incompatible with this function embedded in software. In these ways, by a circular logic, the material means of cultural production (of *processing words*) include a bias towards the production of work that is already familiar to those whose economic dominance constitutes them as the primary market for such products.

The valency between the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘writer’ which Okri, with all the history of romantic (and now postcolonial) theory buttressed behind him, suggests as a natural correlation of vision begins to appear as something more materially determined (Jeyifo, 1996). With a few fortuitous exceptions, those figures whose social inheritance disposes them to anglophone cultural work, are faced with an increasingly *necessary* link between migration and writing. There is a genuine

¹⁴ Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999.

¹⁵ Ashiedu Ogboli, a young writer to whom I turn in a moment, has had his first collection of short stories rejected by British distribution houses on the basis of their being ‘commercially’ unviable because the ‘production standards’ did not meet those expected by UK cultural consumers.

pressure, latent in the history of every position in the sub-field under discussion to take that bend Achebe described, to put distance between self and home. In this respect cultural labour from the non-west increasingly follows the track of raw materials and of cheaply manufactured goods. To put it another way: a specific form of cultural labour, that which emerges from the intellectual fringes of the national bourgeoisie of a nation like Nigeria comes to serve the western academic market interest in such products. As Ngugi says in relation to the forerunning intellectuals of pan-Africanism:

[T]hey rebelled with whatever they had against the alienation to which their education and the places of their education had condemned them. But today we revel in our education. We are proud of it and we wear it as a badge of honour[.] (1997, 151)

The Kenyan writer's comment needs to be read against his more complete discussion of the ideological effects of colonial education in *Decolonizing the Mind*,¹⁶ but the key word is alienation. One might trace a line through the decades of various analyses by, for example, Soyinka (1968), Mutiso (1974), Ngara (1985) and Appiah (1992) which, whatever their differences in critical perspective still make some return to this dilemma. Caught in a sub-field of production that cannot generate forces of gravity specific to itself, structured as it is by institutions whose primary orientation is towards the western market, alienation becomes the indelible logic of success in the game of cultural labour. It is not just that the alienation of the westernised intellectual achieves its apotheosis in that magic 'vault of distance' that Fanon describes. But also

¹⁶ See, in particular Ngugi's extended discussion of the role of language as a grounding force in social solidarity and, in the first instance, as a form of production. His argument draws on Marx's own suggestion that full human individuality is born in sociality. Ngugi goes on, partly from an autobiographical base to delineate the effects of colonial education and the teaching of English as a socially fragmentary 'culture bomb'. (1986, 4-33; 1997, 28-36, 53-64; 1998, 103-111 and forwards). Comparable, also, are his comments in *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* on exile as a deliberate mechanism for neutering the potential threat of the writer by forcing on them a kind of 'exclosure' (1998, 61) which severs them from 'the space which nourishes [their] imagination.' (ibid.) We might recall, in comparison, Obi Egbuna's discussion of finding himself 'a tiny speck in the wind of history

that the alternative, a decision to remain within Nigeria and seek to develop local forms of expression for a domestic audience, forces a writer like Iyayi to carve his trajectory against the pull of the field itself with all the implications for audience and recognition that implies. It is the naturalisation of the relationship between migrancy and writing, between exile and narration which is deceptive here, giving an instinctive twist to what is, in fact, a relationship whose determinations are at least equally institutional and economic.

Let me offer a specific example. Ashiedu Ogboli is a young Nigerian writer. His family background is professional middle-class, a fact which already predisposes him to work in English:

I write in English because it is part of my heritage. English is the language I understand best and feel most comfortable and confident with. [...] Very many upper and middle class Nigerians families do much (or all) of their day to day domestic and official transactions in English. I am one of them. English is an international language with a worldwide reach.

He faces (in the words of an executive in one of the bigger Nigerian publishing houses) 'what is clearly a very discouraging picture of the novel market in Nigeria' and one in which the adoption of texts for educational use is the only means to ensure a sufficient audience. For those who are not already familiar names, a certain amount of capital therefore becomes pre-requisite to fund any publication, whether in the form of family or private loans. In order to recoup costs, books are given launches at which copies are sold, and more importantly some kind of text adoption sought. In Ogboli's case this meant forwarding his collection of short stories to a number of tertiary institutions, and eventually securing an adoption by the University of Lagos. By working to ensure this inclusion on a course list and by submitting to competitions run by the Association of Nigerian Authors and other groups, Ogboli may manage to

[...] that is still blowing me and my Black brothers to [these] shores.' (2000 [1972], 61) Equally, of

cover, more or less, his own costs and debts in the publication. In the context of a largely unreliable communications network, continual travel around Nigeria is required in promoting his work. It will be immediately clear what level of filtering at an economic level this implies in terms of prospective writers. Even from Ogboli's position, however, it means that the only probable means by which to support himself from writing is to be published internationally. As he says, 'ultimately international exposure and success matters so much.' Hence the manuscript of his first novel and of his subsequent collection of short stories have not been published in Nigeria as yet, but have been forwarded to me as a contact in Europe to pass them on, in turn, to British publishing houses. It makes perfect sense, therefore, for Ogboli to align himself, as he does, with 'Ishiguro, Roy or Okri'. It is, of course, likely that only a subject with sufficient educational capital to claim such figures as exemplars is liable to hold a sufficient sense of any potential future outcome from this struggle to deem it worth continuing. The collapse of a market for Nigerian fiction, the fact that 'the desire for patronising general books especially novels is at its lowest ebb' (to quote the publishing executive again) cannot be disentangled from the position in which Nigeria finds itself in the global economy, with a wealthy elite remaining so by ensuring access for multinational and local capital to key raw products. The indirect result of this is that an aspiring writer like Ogboli is pressured to write towards the west. Ideally, to write in the west. It is not that there is no local form of cultural production, but rather that the fiction which manages to achieve recognition on the western market has already passed through a kind of structural pre-selection.¹⁷ It is

course, his insistence on the need to resist this implication of history.

¹⁷ In this respect, a managing director in a prominent British publishing house, whose good faith in terms of wanting to encourage and distribute African writing is quite apparent, seems to hit the proverbial nail on the head. They write, regarding the recent shift to migrant and diasporan writing: 'it may be true that authors who stay behind in Africa are at a disadvantage in some cases, but if it is true then I suspect that [...] it is more to do with the mechanisms of publishing than the themes they are

when the theoretical affinity of narration to migrancy is made to appear most natural that it can best disavow this *structural* tendency, and that it becomes, in a word, ideological. The position into which a writer like Ogboli is forced simply cannot accommodate the assertive claims of an old style cultural nationalism.¹⁸ The only comfortable disposition left to him is to argue for as broad and cosmopolitan an audience as possible, in stark contradistinction to the primarily local readership which many first and second generation writers sought to claim:

I write for people who have an ear for the cadences, nuances and resonance of the language and its flavours everywhere. I write because I feel that I have things to say. I write for educated people.

What I want to emphasise in this, is the need to be aware of *both* the specificity of this situation and the fact that it is in many ways a synecdoche for the nature of capitalist labour as such. It is worth reiterating Marx's point from the fragmentary 1844 manuscripts, which is that all labour under capitalist conditions creates estrangement, the making strange of the human and of human activity. In alienated labour the worker faces the remainder of his species as a body of isolated others, nature as a mere accessory and their own activity, that which defines their humanity, as something alien. Consequently they appear even to themselves as a stranger.

How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? (Marx, 1970, 110)

writing about. In other words it is a *process issue rather than a content issue.*' (personal communication) The point also is, of course, that a materialist position would insist that in many ways process and content define each other.

¹⁸Ogboli is quite aware of the kind of fictional work that is most likely to meet with possible international approval. His first (published) and second (unpublished) collections of short stories both include experiments and pieces in a variety of literary styles. He explained to me that his own favourite from the first collection is the realist and very political story 'Breakfast', and that the picaresque adventure 'Sarauniya of Ijora' meets with most approval among 'general readers'. But most praised by those from a literary critical background is the magical realist piece 'The Imps of Jinadu Street' which clearly follows in the footsteps of Okri. In this respect the repercussions within African universities, of the Western critical consensus in favour of Okri's style of work, comes together with Ashiedu's own diagnosis of the future of the artist in Nigeria ('very bleak') in a fashion that demonstrates the interconnection between hegemonic cultural positions and material circumstances.

Homelessness is, for the producer, the very condition of capitalism, not an aberration. It makes, to cite Adorno's famous piece: 'Dwelling, in the proper sense [...] impossible.' (1974 [1951], 38) The worker is never settled, never humanly resident, their space is always an uneasy one and without fulfilment.

[A] dwelling which he cannot regard as his own home where he might at last exclaim, "Here I am at home," but where instead he finds himself in *someone else's* house, in the house of a *stranger*[.] (Marx, 1970, 155-156)

The specific position of the migrant cultural worker is unusual because it is so peculiarly representative, only *not* in the sense in which it is read in much recent theory. Courtesy of the unsought inheritances of colonial history on the one hand, of the increasing global polarisation of capital on the other, migrant labour gives naked geographical expression to a broader condition of estrangement. Or, to put it another way, there is a direct link between the estranging nature of capitalist production and migration: not that they are isomorphic, but to examine migration - especially in the context of imaginative work - without recalling estrangement in the Marxist sense is a mistake.

Canclini provides a parallel example, albeit at a slightly different level. He analyses, in the context of 'the fractured society', the way in which a cultural industry based around the image of the national patrimony, articulates with rural, local craft production. As the making of crafts ceases to be linked to a particular locale, or the conflicts of that area, or to have a utilitarian value, it becomes increasingly important also for the craft item to be seen as the individual product of an individual figure. The artist, as it were, replaces the artisan. Against the communal nature of prior forms of cultural production is introduced the signature that makes the item 'the singular gesture of the producer.' (1993 [1989], 63) What follows, for the most 'successful', he narrates in brief:

[S]egregated from their community, the creators' world becomes their style. Since their work no longer inhabits their village, artisans can only live within the universe of stereotypes that the market has established around their signature. For the few who succeed commercially, the *final step in this uprooting will be migration to the city* [...] their name will vanish from the community and begin to be known by collectors and dealers [...] A signature, which among artists is something of a personal affirmation and a narcissistic game, *becomes to artisans a paradoxical endorsement of their alienated identity*. Capitalist modernization turns them into individuals without a community, seekers of a solitary place in a system that evades them.' (63-4, my italics)

I met in Jos another writer going by the self-appointed pen-name Lonewolf who spends the long hours of his national service billeting adding to piles of hand written pages that form his prospective novel: *Flagrant Violation*.¹⁹ His intention, as he explained it, was 'to roll out a buster that would beat any of [Tom] Clancy's in print off the New York bestsellers number one position.' Armed primarily with a 1970's Encyclopaedia Britannica Lonewolf's novel is very much a bricolage in Levi-Strauss' sense, a making use of whatever imaginative materials are to hand, an accumulation of scenes featuring Hyde Park, Washington DC and Scottish castles. The whole huge construction hangs together on an international conspiracy plot familiar from the kind of writers he read for pleasure in his days at Jos' prestigious international school: Forsyth, Bagley, MacLean and Grisham. He offers his own précis:

The world of cloak and daggers, the main character? A Nigerian secret service agent called out of retirement, the hang of story? A sinister plot by a supremacist organisation to take over the U.S. govt. and the world with the help of terrorists from over the world (one of whom, a key player, is Nigerian), so this Nigerian secret service agent (who is married to a Scottish heiress (of the MacLeod clan)) is sent off to save the world.

¹⁹ The term is one used in basketball for a serious infringement. In keeping with the traditions of the genre Lonewolf planned a trilogy of themed titles, all related to other basketball terminology.

Lonewolf spends relatively large amounts of Naria getting his material typeset, and forwarding it to Western publishers in line with his intended audience in countries to which he has never been.

Marx says of the estranged worker: 'He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home.' (1970, 110) This describes precisely the position of Lonewolf's cultural labour. Yet this objective situation, in typical ideological fashion, finds inverted subjective expression:

I see myself as a pioneer in a new field, a new genre of writers not necessarily writing about Africa y'know the traditional village setting or urban life [...] I am only identifying with the things that I sort of like, grew up with [...] I tried my hand at a story line about Africa but I just couldn't connect, it never made sense to me and so it was only about '92/93 or so that I seriously attempted a hand at some subject I was familiar with - the present novel about the Nigerian secret service agent.

To a large extent the home to which Lonewolf gravitates in his writing is a series of places which he has never visited, at least in geographical terms: a litany of the elsewhere. But the ideological inversion consists in the fact that subjectively he feels his labour to be more authentic when it is situated in that elsewhere rather than in his own locale. It recalls to mind Macherey's contention that fiction, because it is a work carried out on the raw material of ideology, by giving it a determinate form also provides us with an arrested picture of that ideology.²⁰

From Lonewolf's position, there is no surprise in this displacement: in educational terms the international school he attended is a carefully bordered alien space, a culturally policed piece of grafted America. In a manner reminiscent of Gramsci's comments on the degree to which the domination of a foreign hegemony is expressed in the ubiquity of foreign popular novels,²¹ Lonewolf travels insistently and

²⁰ We make a return to this question, seen, as it were, from its other side (that of readerships) in chapter seven.

²¹ Gramsci, 1985, e.g. 255 forwards. See chapter 7 for further speculation on this point.

with all the instinct of habitus towards Achebe's bend in the road. There could hardly be a more apparent expression of the specific alienation of anglophone cultural work in the neo-colonial context, and of the necessary valency that forms between migration and writing as a form of vocation.

It would, however, be wholly mistaken to leave this analysis at the level of ideological confusion. Cultural work may be alienated, and the writing of anglophone authors in Nigeria may face this alienation as peculiarly warped kind of gravity within their field, but this should not be taken to imply a complete and unconscious acceptance of the position nor an inexorable determinism. It has already been suggested that part of the ongoing struggle in the Nigerian literary field has been towards the achievement of a new logic of cultural production which is in line with earlier considerations of the role of art in social life. Ken Saro-Wiwa, both practically in his work with MOSOP and in his explicit insistence that 'the writer must be *l'homme engagé*' (Larson, 1997, 210) was the 90's most cited example of this determination. There is a certain paradox in the fact that the dominant economic position of the West and the growing hegemony of US culture make this struggle imperative while at the same time questioning whether it can ever be successful as a solely cultural enterprise. Certainly Fanon's position cited in the previous chapter would suggest that a battle for independence that envisages itself purely within a cultural arena has already accepted the conditions of its eventual defeat. In a situation where Nigeria's ubiquitous urban roundabout statues are being replaced by 30 foot replica cans of Pringles, Bourdieu's statements about the way in which the field of culture is influenced by its homologues with the wider field of power also rings true. None of this, however, should be used to render redundant the fight that forty years of Nigerian anglophone writing has been involved in. It is after all, as Benedict Ibitokun

has argued, using the term ‘epiphanic spatiality’, (1991, 409-426) one of the most common of motifs in African fiction to have the protagonist make a kind of fictional migrancy towards the values or actual geography of the West before understanding their mistake. No book has been as often re-written in postcolonial literature as *Heart of Darkness*.

I certainly do not intend to suggest that all Nigerian fiction of the last three generations fits into a specific programmatic frame: third world literature is not all national allegory as Ahmad forcibly reminded Jameson. But there does not have to have been a particular unitary project of cultural nationalism for it to be true that much Nigerian anglophone writing has sought to reject imposed standards from the west. Furthermore, cultural producers cannot avoid dealing with the specific forms of alienation pertaining to their work, whether this results in the socially concerned fiction of second generation authors such as Omotoso and Iyayi, or the bleak sense of national stagnation in subsequent writers like Nkala, Nwagboso and Bandele-Thomas. As is suggested above, even a figure like Soyinka who has been so scathing about reductive forms of cultural identity as negritude, and has rejected any dogmatic suggestion of a necessary literary ‘commitment’, is still engaged, as Jeyifo brilliantly has it, in a search for the ‘tropes of disalienation.’ (‘Introduction’ to Soyinka, 1993). Lonewolf, whose work differs from the figures mentioned above precisely in his lack of a critical position vis-à-vis the western hegemony, still writes to an extent *against* the alienation of his own cultural displacement. It is not just that his central character and his primary adversary are Nigerian, important as this scripting is.²² One of his numerous short stories goes further than this by opening with the crash landing of a

²² This is especially the case given that elsewhere Lonewolf had informed me that he quickly gave up reading Wilbur Smith after beginning to recognise the coding in those novels whereby the African characters are either subsidiary or wholly retrograde. See, in this respect, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (chapters 5 and 6) and Achebe’s own discussion of identification in fiction: 1988, 95-105.

US spy satellite in the small Northern town of his own national service posting. In this moment he writes, as it were, onto the map of the thriller genre a small space of his own significant world, siting it on the same level as scenes set in Speaker's Corner and US Air Bases. In a very dramatic sense, the eyes of the global world are forced into recognition of a particular Nigerian locale. Jameson, as already cited, argues that the mutation of our conceptual worlds 'has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human being to locate itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.' (1984, 83) For Lonewolf however, there is an alienation that exists in the absolute beacon-like dominance of certain global spaces: London, New York, Washington, Tokyo. It is not about being *lost* in postmodern hyperspace, but about being recurrently *found*, consistently sited, personally, in every new thriller he reads, in the elsewhere. It is a process that suggests that talk of the redundancy of centre-periphery divides may be all too early. His response is paradoxical, on the one hand wholly absorbing the representative forms of this hegemony, but also, as in this specific moment, writing into it his own grid references.

The critique of postcolonial theory.

Notwithstanding the fact that this ongoing search for the tropes of disalienation in Nigerian writing might take a conservative rather than a radical form, we are still faced with the following question: what relationship does current western theorising have with the pressure towards migrancy? It is at this point in particular that recent critiques of academic fashion by Brennan, Lazarus and others are so pertinent. But rather than move directly to these figures, I want to take a slightly sideways step in

order to further insist on the necessity of viewing the cultural worker as labour in the alienated sense, albeit with an unusual store of symbolic capital at their disposal. To this end, I move to a brief survey of writing from a more general field of inquiry.

Sociology of migration studies, at least those of a Marxist bent, have long insisted on the fact that migrant labour within capitalism gives rise to a certain political quietism both in the country of its origin and that of arrival. Nikolinakos, Corrigan, Sassen and Castells are among those who have developed models in this respect, demonstrating the degree to which the presence within a national economy of immigrant labour produces ‘the consciousness of a labour aristocracy.’ (Castles and Kosack, 1997 [1972]) Immigrant workers, particularly at that initial point of entry where their position within the labour market is weakest, or where their presence is tolerated but illegal (e.g. the cross-border work of Mexican peasants in the US) act as an imported reserve army with all the implications that holds for local labour struggles. Elsewhere, and increasingly, mobile capital is entirely willing to articulate with forms of labour which are not even formally free in which case these ‘ascriptive economic and social relations are the precise pedestal for the (relatively) more free, seemingly ‘achieved’, relations of others within the working class.’ (Corrigan, 1996 [1977]) All of which simply represents capital’s ability to draw on those labour sources with the least social leverage.²³

With the increasing polarisation of the world’s population the imperative towards migration becomes more and more pressing and time in the West both symbolically more attractive and materially more valuable. This was a point lost neither on those Nigerian postgraduates I interviewed here in Britain, nor on those in

²³ Sassen, as a further example, has shown how the feminisation of the migrant labour force in service and operative jobs follows a pattern initially established around exported management centres for project of foreign capital in the initial countries of origin themselves. (Sassen-Koob, 1996 [1984], 143-166)

Nigeria who described in questionnaire form their feelings about the possibility of a life in the US or UK, a point discussed in later chapters. In general, as Kearney points out (1996 [1986]), such wealth as does flow back down the channels carved out by the passage of migrant labour is rarely of any broad socially developmental value.²⁴ A large percentage of remittances are invested in absentee landlord holdings or in consumer and status goods or goes to support the further education of other family members in Western metropolitan areas. Skills and techniques which are learned in a British university scenario, meanwhile, are transferable only within a very limited horizon, often tied to the presence of specific technology. This has the result, for example, that a post-doctoral chemist studying in Glasgow recognised that his options on returning home would be to choose between a position in a foreign company operating within Nigeria or the establishment of some local small scale production such as soap manufacture. What often does get exported back with returning labour though, as Nikolinakos argues, is the privileged image of the free-market liberal democracy that positions the returnee against populist movements in their own country. Hence, for example, the same interviewee's respect for Sani Abacha on the basis that 'he was tight on the economy.'

The existence of migrant labour and the patriarchal and racist ideologies for which it became the target, particularly during the 70's and early 80's in Britain, served to seal the fractures in the domestic body politic (Sivanandan, 1997 [1976]). Increasingly this process is being replaced by its photo-negative inverse whereby capital itself becomes the mobile element, seeking out productive labour sources

²⁴ Some recent writing would certainly contest this position. Papastergiadis, for example, who critiques some of the 'mono-causal', economically determined theories cited above, tells us that 'The value of remittances sent to the homelands of foreign workers has been estimated as being over \$10 billion.' (2000, 10) In light of recent press reports of the way in which the British public's love of curry is paying indirectly for schools in Asia (ITN, *World Tonight*, 4th August, 2000), however, it is hard not to

beyond the relatively restrictive legislation of those countries where most of the surplus will be finally repatriated. In simple terms it hardly matters whether the relationship is one of migrant labour to capital or migrant capital to labour; the effect is similar. It may indeed be, as Brennan argues, that the mobility of capital is overstated given that it often remains invested in specific forms of sited machinery and infrastructure (1997, chapter 3). Nevertheless the relative ability of manufacturing or service centres to be quickly relocated, or the promulgation of the myth that this is likely (Bourdieu, 1998, 29-44) has the same sedative effect on the domestic working population as the earlier influx of migrant labour. In short then, these and other theorists have argued that what migrant labour - and more recently its obverse: the movement of capital in search of more pliable workforces - represents, is a form of appropriation which stills the fracture lines of class division in both the domestic and the foreign populations.

The crucial contribution of this older body of theory for our study lies in pointing out the fact that there is nothing necessarily radical in migrancy as such. Recent cultural theorising, with its continual focus on the level of discourse and the social imaginary has perhaps not taken sufficient cognisance of these empirical examinations. Migrancy may be threatening to the *unisonance* of our nationally imagined cultural unity, but in these writers there is little evidence of it challenging the material disjunction between different nations, and plenty to suggest that it re-enforces that deeper *unisonance of material interest* of the northern nations' economic power bloc. Furthermore, by insisting that cultural labour *remains labour*, we are forced to recognise that cultural work is equally predicated on consumption, and to interrogate therefore the ways in which cultural commodities are processed and

feel that we are being presented with a renovated, slightly exoticised trickledown theory, designed to put us at our ease as we consume.

received, allocated symbolic status. What these studies also foreground is, to repeat, the alienation attendant on labour whether as an actual loss of land (as has been the case for local populations faced with the intrusions of the incoming petrochemical industry in the Nigerian delta) or a severance from family and familiar patterns as is the experience described by Nigerian born British residents interviewed in Glasgow. It is hardly deniable that the existence of large scale migration post-World War 2 has altered the way in which national and communal identities are experienced, has placed pressure on older subjective understandings of how a group is defined and exposed to some extent the means by which these closed identities constitute their projects as complete and concluded. The commodities produced by cultural labour, however, need a reception and this consuming process in turn, as Marx said, determines the production itself. If this is the case, what are the consequences of recent theory's easy use of terms like deterritorialization? Or of its decision to reject:

an earlier foundationalism grounded on universals, aesthetics, totality, homogeneity, purity, race and attachment to land[.]' (Young, 1998, 8)²⁵

The whole emphasis on the position of the migrant, quite apart from its value in providing for the discursive closure of some postcolonial theorising itself, has an important effect in establishing the priorities of acceptable cultural production on a global level. Furthermore, as Brennan concludes:

Current cultural theory aid[s] this myth [...] of the economy being less about physical toil than about the entrancing ephemera of 'skills' and 'images.' (1997, 162)

Mészáros, writing in the 70's makes a crucial point. Under the conditions of alienated labour, he says, we are continually witness to the elevation of a supposed universality,

²⁵ It would be a separate question to ask whether this extraordinary list of rejected categories does itself involve a rather reductive typology. There is surely a major difference between identities founded in a belief in pure race on the one hand, and an attachment to a particular space or topography on the other.

a cosmopolitanism which, whatever its apparent basis, is never more in the final analysis than the inflated concerns of a particular dominant fraction.

[T]here can be no room for genuine universality, only for the bogus universalisation of the crudest partiality, coupled with an illusory, abstract-theoretical *postulate* of universality as the - merely ideological - negation of effective, practically prevailing partiality. (1970, 32)

This is immediately reminiscent of what was discussed above, Achebe and other Nigerian writers fighting against the imposition of ‘universal’ standards of literary production which they knew represented only ‘the narrow self-serving parochialism of Europe[.]’ (Achebe, 1975, 9)²⁶ Mészáros is drawing on the duality of the whole theme of globalisation in Marx, a lead which I take myself in later chapters. The earlier writer portrays capitalism in a dual sense: as expansive and incorporative but, with a vicious dialectical twist, incorporating only as exclusion, expanding only further alienation.

[P]arallel to the triumph of capitalistic alienation in all spheres of life - art assumes a more abstract and ‘cosmopolitan’ character than ever before and the experience of rootlessness becomes an all pervasive theme[.] (Mészáros, 1970, 71)

It is very difficult not to see much postcolonial theorising, acting even against its own intention, as a new constellation of precisely this process: ‘I think it is important,’ Spivak said in an early interview ‘for people not to feel rooted in one place.’ (1990, 37) The intention in describing postcolonial criticism as new romanticism was precisely to draw attention to the extraordinarily stubborn recycling of theories that link art and homelessness in such a way that the underlying alienation of capitalist cultural work is excised or re-written as a universal viewpoint, a cosmopolitanism; the author as man or woman of the world, purveyor of a truth greater than the parochial.

²⁶ What was actually occurring at this point was the export of a set of traditional standards for cultural production that had become increasingly redundant in Europe itself in the wake of modernism. Faced with its own exclusion from the literary marketplace, European critical theory, like much outdated

Or recently, most subtly, as a universalism of the provisional, that condition which the migrant writer or artist is best placed to encapture for us all. But if Mészáros is right, indeed if Marx is right, this cosmopolitanism serves the interest of a minority fraction. This is exactly the danger of which we must remain aware. We have seen above the warnings of Ngugi (and others) that if African fiction allows itself to become a merely hybrid tradition (1986, 26-7) it succumbs to the incorporative nature of the Western cultural field. Now, however, and coming neatly together with the material collapse of much local publishing, Western theory forecloses the very terms of Ngugi's argument. If all traditions are hybrid, and the idea of 'returning to roots'²⁷ a fallacy, then the whole project of interposing space in which African novelists have often been involved can be aborted. In place of a hybridity that could at least be attacked because it involved the obvious subsuming dominance of one term over another, deconstructivist theory has substituted a hybrid condition that brooks no argument, and is universalised. Defensive narratives of closure are made redundant before they are even fully achieved. I give the last word in this respect to Achebe:

To ask everybody to shut down their history, pack their bag and buy a one-way ticket to Europe or America is just crazy, to my way of thinking. To suggest that universal civilisation is in place already is to be wilfully blind to our present reality, to trivialise the goal and hinder the materialization of a genuine universality in the future. (Achebe, 2000, 91)

Arif Dirlik's well known critique of the 'postcolonial aura' is absolutely crucial here. He admits that the idea that nationalist and other metanarratives are fragmenting is one with great attraction.

Western industry turned elsewhere for its productive arena. See, for example, Roy (1999) on the exporting of the big dam construction to the third world.

²⁷ Spivak, on the one hand, cites Ngugi as an important and influential writer. (1990, 156) Yet in another interview she talks about despising and having contempt for those who are searching for 'roots'. (93) One wonders what she made of his chapter in *Writers in Politics* on a 'Return to Roots' (53-64) or Toni Morrison's essay on the construction of her early novels: 'Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation' (1990).

Crossing national, cultural, class, gender and ethnic boundaries, moreover, with its promise of a genuine cosmopolitanism, is appealing in its own right. (1994, 347)

The problem is that the celebration of fragmenting discursive structures may represent only so much fiddling while the cosmopolis burns.

[I]deological fragmentation may represent not the dissolution of power but its further concentration. It is necessary, to account for this possibility, to retain a sense of structure and totality in the confrontation of fragmentation and totality, the alternative to which may be complicity in the consolidation of hegemony in the very process of questioning it. (347-8)

Dirlik is just one among a number of recent writers, many in the wake of Ahmad's attack, who have drawn attention to the fact that anti-foundationalist theory is abetting the current hegemony. Timothy Brennan's full and detailed study, already cited, has circled around, in particular, the question of national identity and the deconstruction of that discourse. He draws on Gramsci and Fanon to argue, as Dirlik has himself elsewhere (1990, 394-431) that the possibility of a populist nationalism is being jettisoned by Western theory just when it becomes most necessary for smaller countries facing the increasing intrusions of global capital, and a growing pressure to reduce state controls on corporate and trade power.

Brennan insists that the emphasis on the migrant non-Western intellectual, those that he talks about as the 'new cosmopolitans', and this downgrading of the question of national independence have a deep-rooted unity.

The new cosmopolitanism drifts into view as an act of avoidance if not hostility and disarticulation towards states in formation. (1997, 2)

This is a very powerful point but more so because Brennan couples it with an analysis of the dictates of this new cosmopolitanism within the specifically literary field: the kind of writing that is valorised, the kind of authorial position that is celebrated. In particular he sees the current fashion - Rushdie was his earlier example - as being

marked by a political concern that is suitably sceptical of the achievements of independent nationalism, revelling in formal experimentation and plurality but displaying a troubled position whereby the authorial voice is sympathetic to ‘the people’ and yet clearly separate from them. In particular, he adds, there is consistent, implicit rejection of any socialist alternative to the system in domination.²⁸ As argued above, there is no coincidence in the fact that the populist work of an author like Iyayi remains little read in Britain while the visionary dreams of Okri or the grotesque carnival excesses of Bandele-Thomas become representative. Here is an extended citation from Osofisan’s powerful article ‘Warriors of a Failed Utopia? West African Writers Since the 70’s’:

It is no surprise then [he has just detailed the collapse of the African economy, a dwindling audience and the persecutions of military government] that first, almost all authors of the new movement are living in exile, either outside the continent, or in some other country than that of their birth; and secondly, that all of them are published abroad, on the list of publishing houses in the capitalist centres of Europe and America. That first point, about their enforced exile, immediately positions them as disillusioned fugitives; and the second, their place of publication dictates that their audience will be largely foreign. These two factors therefore determine their chosen style - a disjointed, postmodern prose, dissonant and delirious, in conformity with the current respectable literary fashion in the west (confirmed by their ability to win these glittering prizes); and an ahistorical, unideological vocation, in celebration of their escape from, and abandonment of, the African predicament.’ (1997)

My own intentions here are limited, then, to giving a slightly different spin to arguments already made more fully in a growing body of work that is questioning the assumptions that underscore postcolonial literary theory. What is worth bearing in mind is Mészáros’ point that there is a particular form of cosmopolitanism that is connected to the alienation of capitalist society. Nigerian writers face this alienation firstly in the simple material pressure to migrate and on a secondary level in the fact

²⁸ See in particular chapter 1 in *At Home in the World*, (1997) the essay in *Race and Class* (1989a) and the opening and third chapters in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (1989).

that their own class position places them within a sub-field of cultural production where the gravity drags towards the west. Postcolonial theorising and its privileging of the migrant provides a discursive reception in which this very alienation is transmuted into extraordinary symbolic capital. (Ahmad, 1992, e.g. 203-217; Dirlik, 1994) All capital is, finally, alienated labour. The trick is the control of the mechanisms by which the appropriation is extracted and converted. Recent theory has acted as a form of consuming process in which the alienation of migrant cultural work becomes redeemable, in both the sense that one redeems a cheque, and also in the related but more subjective sense of being given positive value, liberated. In relation to manual and service labour capital may itself be increasingly moving outwards, seeking new workforces. It appears that in the literary field, however, the process has occurred the other way around, moving from an initially expansive period, animated by a marketable interest in the exotic, to a situation where the imperative is very much on the producer to make the journey towards the centres of international publishing and distribution.²⁹ More and more Fanon's 'vault of distance' becomes also the vault in which alienated cultural labour is deposited and, with a strange alchemy, transformed to symbolic capital and potentially, the economic form. The terms and conditions of this tacit transaction are such as Brennan details above and as Bourdieu and Spivak detail below.

The emphasis on the peripheral position of the artist, on the relativism which is the correlate of such a position, even on the dramatic experimentation which such a position allows in relation to inherited artistic forms; none of this is necessarily radical. I have used the term 'new romanticism' in this thesis to designate the

²⁹ The movement of producers outwards from Africa, is of course mirrored by the increasing predominance of a need to *import* the work that they produce. Although it is a figure for all types of 'books and pamphlets', UNESCO states that in 1991, Nigeria imported material worth \$31,217,000

continual re-emergence of this theme in the theorisation of culture from the original romantics forward. As Colin Campbell argues, while the dichotomy between utility and play, world and spirit became starker throughout the eighteenth century, ‘estrangement became the natural state for artists and romantically inclined individuals’ (1987, 194). Later, in the context of the modernist movements founded among immigrants in the imperial metropolises of Europe, the detachment of exile (in relation to inherited artistic practice, but also in relation to community) becomes normative:

Their self-referentiality, their propinquity and mutual isolation all served to represent the artist as necessarily estranged, and to ratify as canonical the works of radical estrangement. So, to *want* to leave your settlement and settle nowhere [...] becomes presented, in another ideological move, as a normal condition. (Williams, 1989, 35)

William’s point is that the politics of the avant-garde could ‘go either way’ (62). Not only were the disruptive formal techniques of modernism quickly assimilated to the work of advertisers and the cultural industry, but also the ‘emphasis [on the outsider] which was once, within settled empires and conservative institutions, so challenging and so marginal’ (62) has become perfectly adapted to ‘the politics of this New Right’ (62) with its ideological (although not actual) emphasis on the dissolution of national borders. Similarly, Campbell’s discussion of the romantics and their ethos of the marginal is part of his broader account of how such a position helped give rise to the ‘self-illusory’ hedonism of the modern consumer. It is, I am arguing, a new revision of this old ambiguity in the conception of art and the artist which is at stake in postcolonial theory’s elevation of migrant experience.

while exporting only \$7000 worth of the same material.
(www.unescostat.unesco.org/en/stas/stats0.htm)

The re-valuing of alienation.

I have drawn on Bourdieu already in the foregoing chapter and in particular on his recognition that the freedom from social necessity, i.e. a certain liberty within the various games of cultural and other capitals, is - and in the appearances this liberty gives rise to, *is read as* - a mark of distinction. This is a key theme for this thesis in as much as it suggests how often and how consistently distance is converted to a mark of privilege. The kernel of all forms of distinction, Bourdieu argues, is the appearance of ease, a detachment which is expressive of freedom from compulsion.

[A]ffirmation of a distance from the object [...] is the affirmation of a power over the object and also of the dignity of the subject. (1984, 446)

This basic currency of domination has its everyday appearance - in the ability of the powerful to make others wait for example (Bourdieu, 2000, 230 forwards) - but it is most particularly in relation to cultural productions and receptions that it is discernible. It lies at the very root of the 'pure aesthetic', that mode of appreciation which presents itself as disinterested contemplation and disguises in so doing the fact that consuming art, making meaningful or pleasurable a cultural artefact, is not (as the ideology of 'cultural communism' would have it) a 'gift' available to all but rather the unequally distributed result of careful processes of social inculcation beginning in the home and continuing in the school. Apparent disinterestedness therefore, not only conceals an interest but is itself part of the means by which that stake is assured. Hence the assurance bred of possession continually reproduces itself and its position of dominance:

Culture is the site, par excellence, of misrecognition, because, in generating strategies objectively adapted to the objective chances of profit of which it is the product, the sense of investment secures profits which do not need to be pursued as profits; and so it brings to those

who have legitimate capital as second nature the supplementary profit of being seen [...] as perfectly disinterested[.] (1984, 86)

In all social struggles therefore, but most especially in those fought over cultural capital, the assertion that one is outside of the game, at its margins, is a particularly powerful one. Not only is it a form of this basic statement of disinterest (art for art's sake: we might think, in a Nigerian context, of Okigbo's assertion that he would rather his work were only read by other poets), but it enables a secondary claim that this apparently disinterested position brings with it a more correct form of sight, a realisation of the tawdry stakes in the game, an ability to play the game *as a game*. As Bourdieu writes, laconically, of post-structuralism's 'pure' and ludic critique:

By means of this semi-objectification one can situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside, in the game and on the touchline, i.e. on the margin, at the frontier, in regions which, like the frame, *parergon*, are so many limits, the beginning of the end, the end of the beginning, points from which one can be as distant as possible without falling into the exterior, into outer darkness, that is, into the vulgarity of the non-philosophical, the coarseness of [the] 'empirical'[.] (1984, 497)

It is no doubt immediately apparent why this relates to the present discussion of the migrant condition and to the foregoing discussion of Said. I will go on to argue more fully in chapter five that the fact of having been expatriate comes to act as a version of cultural capital in itself and that those who can claim ownership of it often do so in terms of a claim to an extra 'vision.' The point in relation to recent literary theorising of the migrant is how clearly this *parergon* position is associated with the exile, how it becomes a position whose apparent disinterest, externality to local cultural dictates, comes with the cachet of vision in train. My point via Bourdieu here is not to argue that this is completely false, but that there is a danger of mistaking one kind of estrangement for another. The 'aesthetic alienation' (1984, 445) that is the mark of cultural distinction has the appearance of, but is in fact the absolute inverse of, the

genuine alienation that capitalism dictates for the subaltern. There is a transformative process at play which recycles social loss in the likeness of privilege, confusing daily capitalist estrangement with an ontological condition of the stranger.

[T]he tendency to transform the privation linked to exclusion from the world of practice into a cognitive privilege, with the myth of the ‘impartial spectator’, or the ‘outsider’ according to Simmel, who are the exclusive beneficiaries of access to the point of view on points of view which opens perspectives on the game as a game. (2000, 224)

Although there is not the space to give it as full a consideration as it deserves, Spivak’s discussion in the final section of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* puts specific flesh on these theoretical bones. Throughout the book Spivak has been looking at the figure of the ‘native informant’, which I take to mean both those individuals who were co-opted into work within imperial institutions, but also, in a discursive sense, those figures of the elsewhere that European epistemological projects summoned up, largely in ignorance, to licence their own pronouncements. Spivak works at the admittedly impossible trick of reading back from the position of these presences, in other words, making them reveal explicitly the limits of the discourse in whose service they have been invoked. In the final section of the book she begins with a critique of Jameson’s well-known essay on postmodernism and, in particular, the fact that his assertion of a new universal cultural logic involves a ‘manipulation of the geopolitical other in its production[.]’ (Spivak, 1999, 337) In asserting postmodernism as the new cultural dominant of ‘our world’ Jameson is required to nod to the other cultural orders which inform the heterogeneity of the postmodern subject-position, but only en-route to asserting that ‘the *cultural* (not merely the economic) logic of microelectronic capitalism is universal[.]’ (334) From this, Spivak goes on to discuss very powerfully, and in a way that is perhaps surprisingly reminiscent of the critiques by Dirlik and Ahmad referenced above, how

the postcolonial new immigrant has been manoeuvred into a position whereby they can exist in place of, as a comforting alibi for, subalterns in the non-west. That is to say, another act of foreclosure.

The postcolonial informant has rather little to say about the oppressed minorities *in* the decolonized nation as such, except, at best, as especially well-prepared investigator. Yet the aura of identification with those distant objects of oppression clings to these informants as, again at best, they identify with the other racial and ethnic minorities in metropolitan space. At worst, they take advantage of the aura and play the native informant uncontaminated by disavowed involvement with the machinery of the production of knowledge [...] Or, and more recently, the more stellar level predicates upward class-mobility as resistance, confining the destabilization of the metropole merely to the changes in the ethnic composition of the population. [...] Both the racial underclass and the subaltern South step back into the penumbra. (1999, 360-1)

Spivak dissects then, the impossibility of this space that is offered to eurocentric migrants, while insisting on the need to recognise what a position within the metropole implies in terms of interest.

[A] strong connection, indeed a complicity, between the bourgeoisie of the Third World and the migrants in the first cannot be ignored. However important it is to acknowledge the affective sub-space in which migrants, especially the underclass, must endure racism, *if* we are talking globality, it is one of the painful imperatives of the impossible within the ethical situation that we have to admit that the interest of the migrant, however remote, is in dominant global capital. The migrant is in First World space. (380-1)

Coming to seek justice, welfare or safety the new immigrant discovers that the *'only'* entry is through a forgetfulness, or a museumization of national origin in the interest of class mobility[.] (398) What seems particularly crucial to me in her discussion, of which only the bare lineaments are suggested here and much of which is pre-empted by her earlier work (e.g. 1996 [1990]), is Spivak's suggestion that it is a rising culturalism that in part enables this foreclosure.³⁰ Hence her insistent separation of

³⁰ Papastergiadis writes of Said: 'Said's faith in the migrant intellectual is not premised on a romantic disposition that correlates creativity with adversity, but is linked to his deeper claims for promoting a relational rather than fixed consciousness.' (2000, 119) It will be apparent by now that this theoretical

economic and cultural logics and refusal to see the former as disposable. Hence also the following valuable reminders which capture much of what this thesis intends to say:

It is Capital in the abstract that “frees” the subject of Eurocentric economic migration to stage “culture” in First World multiculturalism. [...] Increasingly and metonymically, transnationality, a new buzz word for cultural studies, is becoming a synonym for the movement of people. To recode a change in the determination of capital as a cultural change is a scary symptom of cultural studies, especially feminist cultural studies. [...] I could perhaps re-state Jameson’s thoughtful thesis this way: the casualties of economic postmodernization are not culturalists; they teach us to keep our glance fixed at the crossed-out capital logic of postmodernity. (1999: 405; 412; 421)

Finally, also, my employment of Bourdieu and Spivak hopefully brings us full circle, in that their writing helps justify my use of the term ‘new romanticism’ at the outset of this theoretical discussion. In particular, as the work referenced in this section makes clear, it little affects the dominance of high cultural capital whether it stakes its claim in terms of a *paregonic* liminal vision (as in current theory) or a *panoramic* overarching vision, as in romantic theory. Both are equally compatible with a baseline distanciation from the material world. In this respect the supposed break made by poststructural theory offers no *necessary* challenge to the distinction of those whose social position is reliant on the ownership of cultural capital, and explains how the severance from locality that gives rise to migrant cultural labour can be recoded as a form of privilege.³¹

section is centrally concerned with the way in which such apparently radical shifts in the conception of the relationship between art and the world can actually be covert replications of old positions. Certainly Spivak’s point is that the emphasis on relational consciousness, legitimate as it is, may be just as capable as correlating creativity with adversity. In this respect it is no surprise to find Papastergiadis emphasising immediately afterwards: ‘[T]he concept of the imaginary and the workings of the imagination have a more central role in the formation of these new social and cultural practices.’ (ibid.)

³¹ In his most recent account of the questions of *Home and Exile* Chinua Achebe ends with a striking autobiographical note that is completely relevant to everything discussed within this chapter, and within the thesis as a whole. He begins with the memory of attending a training course for radio broadcasters in a then frightening, overbearing London. In particular he recalls being asked to commentate and describe a specific scene around him for an imagined audience. Nervous that his lack

Conclusion.

There is an unspoken directionality in so much of this of which we must be wary. Achebe's bend in the road was always one moving *away* from his home. Seen from the other side, the migrant in Bhabha is implicitly taking a journey *into* the West.³² Of course this is an important inversion of the colonial travels of missionary, anthropologist, trader. On the other hand, there remains something assimilative about a model of migrancy which simply assumes the direction of travel. In the mythic pilgrimage as Mircea Eliade classically argued, the journey of the liminal figure is forever made from the elsewhere to the 'prestige of the Centre.' (1974 [1949], 7) The paradox of this space, the goal of the supplicant, is that while it remains utterly central it is also pivotal, the axis of all worlds, the spoke linking heaven, hell and earth. There could not there be a more apposite image for our current critical paradigms than this conjunction that proclaims the running together of every conceptual universe in

of local knowledge would make him look naive, Achebe is surprised to discover that his assessor went 'so far as to suggest that my transparent lack of familiarity with the setting had given my commentary an exceptional quality of freshness and power[.]' (2000, 102) But Achebe's response to this metropolitan celebration of the pargonic vision is not one of acceptance, but of scepticism. '[M]ight such graciousness not carry at the same time a suggestion that London was perhaps a little too dumb, too easy a dupe, too ready to fall prey to any wily wanderer from its distant, poverty-stricken provinces? Perhaps I could make a living here merchandising my inchoate perceptions of the city fabricated in the smithy of a gigantic unfamiliarity. But could I see myself taking that as my life's work? I would rather be where I could see my work cut out for me, where I could tell what I was looking at. In other words my hometown. (102-3) And he moves immediately from this to an attack on the idea that the West has somehow inaugurated a benevolent universal civilisation, and to a questioning of Salman Rushdie: 'I referred earlier in these reflections, with complete approval, to Salman Rushdie's happy characterization of the decolonizing process by the metaphor of postal correspondence. But when he goes on to say in another context that "Literature has little or nothing to do with a writer's home address," I just wonder if in seeking to free the writer from all ties we might not end up constraining literature's long reach into every nook and corner of every writer's experience and imagining, including his extraordinary encounter with that invention called the passport.' (104-5)

³² 'For the liminality of the Western nation is the shadow of its own finitude: the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space; the repetition or return of the migrant to alienate the holism of history. The postcolonial space is now supplementary to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn't *aggrandize* the presence of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double.' (1994, 168)

mutual non-closure and provisionality and yet, *in this very proclamation*, in this confluence, *re-affirms its own irreducible centrality*.

[There is a] generalised condition of postmodernity into which all contemporary cultures are now irretrievably ushered so that the figure of the migrant, especially the migrant (postcolonial) intellectual residing in the metropolis, comes to signify a universal condition of hybridity and is said to be the Subject of Truth that individuals living in their cultures do not possess. (Ahmad, 1995, 13)³³

Against this ‘surreptitiously imperial’ (Brennan, 2001, 81) model of the cosmopolitan writer I want to conclude by posing a number of alternative images. Firstly, I want to draw attention to a kind of model of the travelling artist that has been variously posited by African writers themselves, refusing to view this journey as a liberatory movement, but rather mourning its disassociations and remaining wary of its dangers. In other words, just to state once more the terms of that ‘combative tradition’ of cultural self-sufficiency that African writers have been involved in asserting. We might take as a first example Soyinka’s complex discussion of the mythic archetype as a model for contemporary African art. In particular Soyinka’s reference is to the Yoruba deity Ogun³⁴ who makes a descent into the realm of chaos and liminality, to the threatening site of permanent dissolution and loss of place, and returns having carved out something new. This mythic odyssey is the one that Yoruba ritual celebrates, replicates. It becomes, therefore, in Soyinka’s aesthetic, a figure also for the modern African writer.

The community emerges from ritual experience ‘charged with new strength for action’ because of the protagonist’s Promethean raid on the durable resources of the transitional realm[.] (1976, 33)

³³ Or: ‘Propelled and defined by media and market, cosmopolitanism today involves not so much an elite *at home*, as it does spokespersons for a kind of perennial immigration, valorised by a rhetoric of wandering, and rife with allusions to the all-seeing eye of nomadic sensibility.’ (Brennan, 1989a, 2)

³⁴ I recognise that in saying this I am ignoring Quayson’s criticism that too much Soyinka scholarship simply appears to read him with an ‘unmediated Ogun symmetry’ (1997, 66). This critic’s own detailed discussion deserves a fuller account than space allows here (see 67-75).

We can find a comparable metaphor in an essay by Achebe about his childhood. In discussing the fraught question of his educational and social inheritance, a space he touches on fictionally in 'Chike's school-days' (1977, 35-40) and from which emerged also the silence of the non-novel in the middle of his supposed *African Trilogy*³⁵ Achebe employs a very similar image to that of Soyinka:

We [live] at the crossroads of cultures [and] the crossroads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed spirits, but he might also be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision. (1975, 67-8)³⁶

In some senses, this template of the migrancy of the artist is not altogether dissimilar from those critiqued above as being romantic. There is still a certain implication of unique vision, of the poet as a Promethean, or rather Ogunic, figure. But there are also a number of important differences. Firstly in the space that is crossed. For metropolitan theory the interest in migrant art lies in the fact that it represents, as Said says, a 'journey in', the coming from there to here. In these references however, and this of course relates back to alienation, the crucial space is the gap that opens up between the artist and his or her local audience. It is, in other words, the same space, only seen from its other side. Secondly, this is a return journey, it is one made there and back. As with Osofisan's diagnosis, quoted at some length previously, there is no dissimulation here about the institutional centrality of the Western field of cultural

³⁵ Achebe has noted in the introduction to the single volume edition of the putative *African Trilogy* (1998a, 9-12) that there is a missing novel that was to have come between the time period covered in *Things Fall Apart* and that of *No Longer at Ease*. But he felt, he says, the impossibility of the negotiation that middle novel story would have entailed, given that it would have required the examination of the actions of his father's generation, those who 'navigated the perilous crossroads.' (11) Implicitly, also, it would have involved Achebe digging at his own social inheritance.

³⁶ We can hear Ngugi playing on the same prototype, albeit with a more direct expression of history, when, as part of the consideration of a previous generation of African intellectuals such as DuBois, he calls for the rejection of a model of European isolated artistic creation: '[The colonial African intellectual] went into the colonial fortress and, whatever he got from there, he came to share it with the people [...] They went across the seas and they always came back, and within their limitations, they tried to break the barriers between themselves and the people.' (1997, 150-1)

production. A theoretical junking of binaries of power while such relations remain materially effective must be a mistake.

Gibbs is surely correct in seeing the God Ogun, fighting his way through the 'fourth stage' of Yoruba epistemology, the chthonic realm, as the symbol of Soyinka's own project and indeed biography. (*DLB*, 1993, 117) And crucially the ritual practitioner, like the God, enriches the community with his passage. Meanwhile Achebe stands at the crossroads and wrestles many headed demons, with a twisting multiplicity of perspectives. He too returns, both one headed and newly gifted to his people. It is migrancy envisaged as rite of calculated risk.

Much has been written about the borrowing of contemporary anglophone African authors from the oral tradition in terms of formal structure, temporal schemes and the multi-generational, swirling communal narrative. The above also suggests, however, that part of what African writers have fought to hold on to is an understanding of what it is to control narrative within the group, the responsibility and power of that position.³⁷ Just as the development of a fiction influenced by oral patterns challenges the Western bourgeois notion of the novel form, so the idea of the novelist as a descendent of the communal storyteller challenges the received Western conception of the lonely romantic author and his recent, more playful reincarnation.

At the risk of appearing to be bringing all this back into the safe hands of another western critic, albeit one who knew about both alienation and exile, I want to add here a note from Walter Benjamin and his well-known essay on 'The Storyteller.' He remarks at the outset of this peculiarly relevant piece that the storyteller is a figure

³⁷ See, for example, Robin Ikegami's essay on 'Knowledge and Power, the Story and the Storyteller' dealing with this theme in *Anthills of the Savannah*. (1992, 493-507). The whole fraught issue of representation - speaking for and speaking of - is too broad to find analysis here. But it does appear that these models imply something that Neil Lazarus has argued we need to reinstate against a disabling relativism in postcolonial theorising that glosses any act of 'speaking on behalf of' as appropriative. That is to say, a renewed sense of the achievements of 'anti-imperialist intellectualism.' (1993, 93)

born of two traditions, the traveller and the local, the journeyman and the resident artisan: 'someone who has come from afar [and someone] who has stayed at home.' (1968, 84) Crucially: 'the figure of the storyteller gets its full corporeality only for the one who can picture them both.' My point is that the archetypal migrant writer of postcolonial theory is an expanded, globe-traversing version of only the mobile half of Benjamin's figure. Which implies that they are also only semi-corporeal, only half-bodied. Appropriately enough, JanMohamed's analysis of the 'specular border intellectual' suggests something of this very sort:

While "worldliness-without-world" emphasises the specular border intellectual's awareness of his or her location outside the group in question, "homelessness-as-home" accentuates a *jouissance* derived from transitoriness [...] it privileges the pleasure of border-crossing and transgression. (1995, 457)

The prototype of Achebe and Soyinka, however, is that of the storyteller *returning*, of the artist as representative of his or her group whose move across the fourth stage, the space of disassociation is made as a calculated risk on behalf of the collective whole and not in search of a supposed *jouissance*. Of course, this is only imagery, an explicit position taking within the field, but if we read it against the alienation of migrant cultural labour and its western re-valuation these early statements of intent by Nigeria's pathsetting authorial presences do take on a heroic tone. Reiterated in the current climate they seem to insist, against a spurious cosmopolitanism, on a necessary sense of belonging and responsibility. Furthermore, there is the emphasis on retaining and not losing audience, a position which necessarily opposes the idea that in restricted readership there is symbolic kudos.

How, then, to conclude this theoretical look at the question of migrant writing as it appears in recent theory? I have tried to argue that rather than accepting the new version of romanticism by which the migrant intellectual becomes just the most recent

avatar of the essential homelessness of art, we need to view the situation through the lens of alienation. Cultural production, as a peculiar kind of labour, remains as estranged as any other form of capitalist work and is as incorporated into the demands and pressures of the market. In the global context a situation has developed where, in the aftermath of postmodernism, fashionable western theory has highlighted certain key concerns. Important as much of this work is, the emphasis represents the current appetites of consumption among the world's primary market for anglophone literature. The result is that thematically and with a correlated and increasing material pressure, non-Western fictional production is pushed towards position-takings which emphasise the provisionality of cultural constructions and the falsity of such grand narratives as national emancipation or social liberation at the moment when they become most necessary for so many.

I have already offered the alternative vision of artistic travel given by two Nigerian writers. Perhaps another suggestion might be added. We have seen that the migrant in Arnold Van Gennep's conception is the first and underlying image of the liminal state of ritual. For Van Gennep there is *passage* in every rite and the participants - the new born child, a spouse from outside the immediate group, or the dead - are all figures possessed of the status of stranger. Thus their alien-ness requires the incorporative ritual to bring them within the corpus, the social body. But Van Gennep is explicit in stating that his theories relate only to the society whose epistemological order is founded on the distinction between sacred and profane. He continually reiterates that he does not see them as obtaining in the conditions of secular rationality. And why not? Because, he says, in what sounds like an early thesis of globalism, estrangement is a thing of the small scale social world:

The more society resembles ours in its form of civilisation, the thinner are its internal partitions and the wider and more open are its doors of communication. (1960 [1908], 26)

But what if, as Marx argued, this is not the case? What if increasing global inter-penetration leads not to a comfortable universalism, but rather to the very multiplication of strangeness and disassociation? Bereft of rituals by which we can reintegrate ourselves, secular capitalist modernity itself offers no solution to the alienation it produces. The thinning inner partitions of Van Gennep's visionary world have proved at best semi-permeable membranes. The movement across boundaries, especially national borders, is still hugely tied to the possession of capital, personal or corporate.

What I want to suggest is a final twist to all this, courtesy of Victor Turner's re-analysis of liminality. Turner asks what it is that makes the stranger dangerous and finds the answer in the fact that they are a *rubato* figure, escaping, eliding and slipping beyond the categorisations of the social order, hence wearing that auratic charge of the non-categorisable in the sense that Mary Douglas (1966) classically formulated. In this respect the ritual participant is also stripped of position and their liminal status is a powerful one, requiring a careful control precisely because they have passed momentarily beyond the instituted limits of reified social knowledge. What they represent, he argues, is a quality of *communitas*, the pure social bond, the counterpart, shadow and yet antithesis to hierarchical social structure itself. Clearly Turner's argument has some potential affinity with a poststructuralist position. For example:

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. (1977, 128)

This much fits well with Bhabha's point, for example, that identity is constituted from the margins. So, in relation to our current theme *communitas* might become the

theoretical tool by which to re-enforce the suggestion that the migrant artist reveals the limits through which identity is construed and thereby, a liminal space where some commonality might be found. In a world of colliding cultures art as the revelation of unity not despite, but in and through difference. Turner himself certainly makes this reading plausible, specifically referring to art as a key site of potential *communitas*: ‘Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, “edgemen”[.]’ (1977, 128).

It would be a comforting, but in the end, misleading argument. *Communitas* is the quality of the figure who has temporarily slipped beyond categorisation and into a ‘limbo of statuslessness’ (Turner, 1977, 97) There is nothing in the least ‘statusless’ or unclassified about the Vietnamese refugee in a Hong Kong detention centre, or the illegitimate cross-border labourer in the US, or the Nigerian resident arriving in a British airport. The structures of classification that confront these and other global migrants are not pliable or mutable but explicit and concrete.³⁸ Of course, immigration controls and the ‘processing’ of asylum applications might be read, from the point of view of the national community, as a contemporary rite of passage serving to re-integrate the unclassified figure, to neuter the threat of *communitas* that emerges ‘from the edges.’ But from the point of view of the global division of labour

³⁸ ‘Nigerian national Semira Adamu died of asphyxia within hours of an attempt to forcibly deport her from Brussels-National airport, Belgium, in September 1998. The ministry of the Interior stated that she had been handcuffed and shackled during the deportation, and that one of the gendarmes had pushed a cushion against her face [...] In August 1994 another Nigerian national, Kole Bankole, died of heart failure on board a plane from Frankfurt, Germany. He had been restrained, sedated and gagged with a device made from socks and a belt by one of the accompanying police officers [...] In May [1999] Marcus Omofuma, a Nigerian national, died during a flight from Austria to Nigeria; his arms and legs had been bound by police officers and he had been gagged with adhesive tape. One witness reportedly stated, ‘They wrapped the entire upper half of his body and arms with adhesive tape like a mummy.’ (*Amnesty*, March/April 2000, 7) See also Rory Carroll’s report on the extraordinary precautions taken to fence off and prevent access to Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the African mainland, which had become the site of an often lethal pilgrimage for prospective migrants including many Nigerians. *Guardian*, London (2000) *Dying to Get to Europe*. August, 14th, 6-7. Incidents such as these make it very difficult to accept Bauman’s qualified but primarily optimistic diagnosis that state control of ‘the stranger’ is breaking down. ‘Strangers are no longer authoritatively preselected, defined

structural positions are far less easy to elude. It is, as Fanon so urgently insisted, insulting to talk happily about essential human equality in the context of a system premised on the non-existence of this state. To seek the trace of *communitas* in these migrations is to look for the right thing in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Paradoxically the common human bond under capitalist conditions, consists in alienated value, in the cash nexus as Marx had it. Perhaps it is in tracing the global passage of capital itself, either from site of production to point of sale, or in the more subtle networks of financial transactions, that we would find the inverted, parodied remnants of contemporary *communitas*.

Meanwhile, what migrancy reveals more than anything else is not the provisionality of cultural boundaries but the absolute continuity of lines of exclusion and division. If the prognoses of continuing polarisation of global wealth (Amin 1997; 1998) *within* as well as between nations (Hoogvelt, 1997) are correct, then an ongoing witness to the continuity of these divides will be crucial. At its best, I would suggest, this is what writing about migrancy may encapsulate, as can be seen in the earlier work of Buchi Emecheta for example. Or, in an opposed and wholly unintentional sense, in the angst ridden but materially easy jetsetting of Olatoun William's bourgeois characters between Paris, London and Kaduna. The early Ben Okri gives this position a clear statement when, in *The Famished Road* he has Azaro say: 'The poor also belong to one country.' (33) This is the additional border we need to keep recognising, not because conservative forms of national, ethnic, religious or gender boundaries³⁹ are being increasingly deconstructed, made provisional, but precisely because they remain entrenched.

and set apart, as they used to be in the times of the state-managed, consistent and durable programmes of order-building.' (1997, 54)

³⁹ At the time of writing riots in Kaduna between Muslims and Christians, following the declaration of Sharia law in a number of northern states, has claimed an estimated 600 lives. Recent reports talk of

Igbo civilians streaming homewards in an ominous restaging of pre-civil war events and there have been reprise attacks in the south. A columnist on the 25th of February, 2000 was already making deliberately provocative statements about 'The Second Jihad', and the possible necessity of a new internal conflict. Rueben Abati. *Guardian* (Lagos), *The Second Jihad*. February 25th, 2000.

Chapter 4: Migrancy and Alienation in Nigerian Fiction.

There are in Marx, Jameson argues, moments when the reader is asked to 'do the impossible', to realise the paradox that 'capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race, and the worst.' (1984, 86) It seems to me that Spivak's critique of this reading is more or less unanswerable, especially her insistence that the project in Marx is not to recuperate best and worst in a single thought, but rather that we 'must work to sublimate the good things *in* capitalism *out of* capitalism' (1999, 327). Not best and worst together, but either/or. Marx's discussion of capital's globalising properties, of its expansive, protean ability to incorporate human variety within itself is ambivalent only inasmuch as he saw capital producing the conditions for that which it could never itself achieve, a genuine cosmopolitanism. This is why elsewhere, describing the image of capitalism in Marx, Spivak uses the term *pharmakon*, a medicinal poison, that which is required to operate the dialectic - to produce healthy society - but which, left to itself, impedes this possibility.

This is a lesson all the more urgent in the shadow of recent critical talk of multicultural states and intersubjectivity. Globalisation is supposedly more available, more nakedly witnessed as a process in imaginative representations, in works of a cultural order than in anything else. 'Modernity has turned every element of the real into a sign' as Appiah says. But the mutual intelligibility that this act implies is other than it presents itself, is premised on a wholly different relation than that of culture and language. '[A]nd the sign reads "for sale."' he tellingly concludes his aphorism. (1992, 145)

Crusoe, Marx and Ekwensi.

In other words, globalisation and estrangement in Marx come completely together. It is the value of alienated labour power which, contrary to the more naked appropriations of a feudal order, provides the invisible currency by which the exchange of commodities functions. Whatever nexus or linkage the market makes available for human interaction, its premise and originating condition then, is the expropriation of value in production, the estrangement of the worker from the product of their work. What is extraordinary is that in the centre of his explanation of this process, in his famous section on the commodity fetish, Marx turns, not to economic data or to market statistics, but to *Robinson Crusoe*. His immediate point here is to re-read Defoe *against* his usage by bourgeois economy in which the castaway stands as an ideal figure of the individual producer. In so doing he is pressing the idea that what is exchanged in the commodity circuit is abstract, reified, human labour. This argument seems absurd, Marx says, precisely because contemporary analyses have been so successful in making it incredible. In turning to Crusoe, therefore, Marx is seeking to force from this fictional figure a truth uttered against its current employment.¹

Beyond this however, Marx is using Crusoe to another, different end. Hence it is that he turns, a page later, to compare the island-resident bourgeois figure with the relationships of production in his own utopian vision: ‘a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common [...] All

¹ I point the reader here to Spivak’s brief discussion of this section in Marx, from the work already quoted (1999, 177-179). Marx, in her argument, is using Robinson to show that what applies to exchange-value applies also to use-value (which Robinson, in his isolation from exchange relations, represents). That is to say, that use as much as exchange value exists because of the fact of objectified human labour. Robinson then, is a kind of counterpoint example to the discussion of commodity fetishism. ‘Marx is teaching the worker the counter-intuitive lesson that the complicity of use- and

the characteristics of Robinson's labour are here repeated, but with this difference, that they are social instead of individual.' (Marx, 1995, 48) Why this imaginative juxtaposition? He has already established that labour is social, that Crusoe is the false individualist dream of bourgeois economy. It seems to me that his point here is more implicit. He is deliberately drawing the reader's attention - 'Let us now picture to ourselves, by way of change' (48) - to the isolation of Crusoe, to the fact that in a paradoxical sense, as Engels recognised², there is something *true* in Defoe's creation. Not that Crusoe is the idealised figure of individual production in the fashion that political economists employed him but rather, that he is archetypal in his predicament, in his solitude. Marx asks an act of imagination from the reader so that Crusoe's position falls into relief. Here, after all, is the very character of early capitalist expansion, the archetype of outward colonial movement. But there is a deep irony in the fictional representation. The qualities which make Crusoe the perfect figure for traditional political economy and which are in this sense wholly misleading as a basis for analysing production - i.e. his confinement as an individual, his alienation - are, from the point of view of the subjective experience of life under capitalism, truthful. On the one side expansion, the market's drive to push beyond whatever Chinese walls present limits to its growth, as figured in Crusoe's sense of the imperative of global movement, both a means to and form of class mobility, a path to accumulation. On the other, severance, loneliness and a domination of human being over human being. In

exchange-value shows that the private is measured by and contains within it the seeds of the social.' (1999, 178)

² Engels suggests in a letter to Kautsky that Marx's Robinson is the '*genuine*, original Robinson of Daniel Defoe [...] In a word, a true 'bourgeois.' (Marx, 1978, 318) Rather than reading Engels' comment as a suggestion that Marx had got to the heart of Defoe's conscious portrayal of Crusoe - i.e. that he had uncovered somehow Defoe's genuine intention in his work - I would suggest that what Engels meant was that Marx's Robinson reveals the truth about the individual bourgeois over and against the portrayal of this figure in traditional political economy, and had recovered thereby what was latent in any fictional portrayal of the class.

this sense then, it is true to say that, approaching Robinson Crusoe, Marx is asking from the reader an appreciation of the duality of what is being represented.

I make this brief prefatory analysis as a form of guide, hopefully, for my own series of linked readings which constitute this chapter. I intend, below, to look at the two correlated themes of alienation and migration in Nigerian anglophone fiction, taking from Marx the lesson that imaginative representation, not wholly unlike the religious 'reflex of the real world' (49) with which he concludes that chapter, can portray aspects of obtaining social relations in strange inverted ways. To repeat: there is an odd circularity at play here. The alienation of Crusoe, taken by bourgeois economy as a naturally existing condition of production, becomes part of the very problem it is representing. The representation of Crusoe's isolation is truthful, but it becomes also an aspect of the cultural means by which that pathological reality is normalised, made standard condition. Marx's lesson for the reading of fiction is to recognise the need for this radical dialectical awareness, an appreciation that what literature presents may be both truth and lie simultaneously, may be both available as implicit critique and a potential means by which the represented is made hegemonic: both resemblance and dissemblance, simulation and dissimulation.

I want to conclude this introduction with an extraordinary note from Cyprian Ekwensi's novel *Iska* (1966). The comparison between Ekwensi and Defoe is often striking, and it seems to me that there need not be anything *necessarily* appropriative in making this statement. Given that Ekwensi, like Defoe, writes out of an emergent urban capitalist order it would be surprising if their work did not share similarities, especially in as much as they occupy homologous spaces in their respective fields of cultural production, both originating much closer to the arena of popular writing than

that of high culture as such.³ This does not mean that Ekwensi's work is predestined to follow the template of a European cultural development nor that we should use the comparison to foreclose that which is specific in his locality and writing.⁴ Nevertheless, like Defoe, and unlike the more fraught descriptions of urban life in some of his contemporaries there is in Ekwensi a powerful representation of the ambiguities of the new order. As a young questionnaire respondent in Jos, who had little time for Nigerian writing of the Achebe school, told me approvingly: 'Cyprian Ekwensi [...] writes on the African realities.' *Jagua Nana* (1961) and *People of the City* (1963 [1954]) are novels riven with this contradiction: a jouissance in the fluidity and adventure of Lagos interwoven with a lingering sense of isolation and dislocation. The recognition of a new female social freedom is set beside the inscription of a re-formulated patriarchal control which is given its clearest expression in the voyeuristic patrol of the narratorial eye itself, playing over the bodies of female characters.⁵ Or equally, the rhetoric of romantic love is rendered fragile and hollow by Ekwensi's continual exposure of the economic motivations of his characters. Dennis' thefts, Taiwo's politics, Fonso's trading, Jagua's love affairs: all are finally motivated by the same kind of desperate economic imperative of personal survival which is the narrative driving force in *Moll Flanders*. In *Jagua Nana* too there are touches of a

³ Ekwensi, it will be remembered, was one of the original Onitsha pamphleteers. The fact that he became also one of the first writers on Heinemann's African Writers list does not reduce the fact that his work occupies what Bourdieu refers to as a kind of intermediary, middle-brow position. In this respect see the correlation between Grub Street pamphleteering and Onitsha market writing first implied by Obiechina in his examinations (1972, 1973). Critical work on Ekwensi includes: Nazareth, 1985; Inyama, 1991; Killam, 1972; Nwahunanya, 1990.

⁴ I take my defence here with Neil Lazarus, who, in comparing the work of Armah to that of Adorno recognises the potential charge of 'Larsony' (i.e. the term coined by Armah for critical work which reduces African writing to European typologies and comparisons). Lazarus argues as follows: 'To speak of [similarities in] politico-ideological positions is already to overcome 'Larsony', since what is being compared are less ideas viewed as the 'property' of those who first articulate them than ideas viewed as appropriate to, and the effects of, specific social circumstances of which it would be meaningless to say that their manifestation in one part of the world rather than another at any time signified social 'advancement' or 'retardation.' (1990, 44)

⁵ See also 'From the Brink of Oblivion: The Anxious Masculinism of Nigerian Market Literatures.' (Newell, 1996) for a discussion of this question in market literature.

Defoe-like roving picaresque⁶ and an incongruous upbeat conclusion with all this suggests about the uncertainties of urban modernity. In the finale of that novel, however, what lingers in the reader's mind is surely not Jagua's lucky break, but Rosa's vision of Taiwo's abandoned roadside corpse, viewed from floor five of a hotel. It is as powerful a scene of human alienation and loss as in any of the major first generation Nigerian novels:

Rosa told how she was going to the market and she heard that a dead man was lying at the roundabout in the centre of the city. She was terrified. It was said to be lying near the market-place, in front of the Hotel Liverpool. People going to work saw it from their cars in the early morning as they came up the hill. The policeman at the control point had the cape of his raincoat up and the white cap was sodden with the endless rain. The roads were all muddy and pitted; the gutters were full, the farms in the suburbs were overgrown with weeds. Lagos was in a state of chaos that day. It seemed as if the ghost of that corpse had gone abroad among them. The body was lying there twisted and swollen; one knee was drawn up against the chest, the arms were clutching at the breast, rigid like a statue.

In Africa you see these things, Rosa reminded her. Rosa said she circled round the body three times. She saw some dogs circling it too. Perhaps they were waiting for nightfall to feast on the body of the famous man. This was in Lagos, nowhere else. Then she went up into the Hotel Liverpool and stood looking down from five floors at the chain of red, blue, green, scarlet, yellow and cream cars; at the slow jerk and stop of the traffic flowing into the island. But it was the body of Uncle Taiwo, lying in the rain, that seemed to rivet all the attention and to spread terror among the drivers[.] (1961, 139)

It is a peculiar belatedness which differentiates Ekwensi's work from that of Defoe. This needs to be stated clearly: his writing is precisely *not* repetition without difference, is *not* a replication of some sequence from a universal cultural teleology through which the west has already progressed and thus experiences in the contemporary re-presentation a memory of its own past. Some of postcolonial theory's most valuable work has been to interrogate our Western historiographies in

⁶ Ekwensi's work, much more notably than that of Achebe, at least until *Anthills of the Savannah*, or the other first generation writers such as Amadi and Munonye, often sites itself in the northern areas of Nigeria. This is the case with the opening of *Iska* and with his short, cinematic novel *Burning Grass* (1962).

order to expose this kind of appropriative suggestion. Being wary of this however, should not become a blind to the fact that the capitalist order with which Ekwensi's fiction engages is one denied the historical expansion that was available to Europe. The consequences of the fact that Africa comes to capitalism *late*, as Onoge argues (1992; see also Iliffe, 1983, 64-87) especially given the necessity of an external, exploitable workforce to allow the system domestic viability (Lenin, 1993 [1917]) are hugely entangled with the question of under-development (Rodney, 1972; Webster, 1984, chapter 4). It is this real, material difference, rather than any late-coming on the template of necessary cultural evolution that distinguishes the world with which Ekwensi engages. So, strangely enough, it is precisely *Robinson Crusoe*, or at least the template of migration as a form of primitive accumulation, as colonial expansion, that is the impossible figure to Ekwensi. The resulting neocolonial predicament for Nigeria, as Karin Barber has suggested (1982, 431-450), includes a strange dislogic, the apparent detachment of wealth from productive labour. It becomes impossible, in the context of accumulation based on contacts and kickbacks, to make sense of the processes of social distribution. Furthermore, capitalism's discrepancies are exposed without the palliative and camouflage of an imperially bankrolled Keynesian welfare settlement. So it is that in *Iska*, migrancy comes into the frame precisely in relation to the *inexplicability* of the system. Throughout the frantic pace of the book *Iska* is surrounded by the corruption of politics, by tribal incitements she knows are employed as a divide and rule tactic, by such occult explanations of social process as Barber refers to. As the strange and dark conclusion looms, she finds her lover, the journalist Dapo Ladele, selling his pen and independence to the aspiring party candidate Nafotim. She confronts him with the following statement:

I feel like killing myself. I hate all this nonsense. And worse still, the sight of you. I hate to live in this era [...] What I want is to go away

from Nigeria - to England, France, America, anywhere at all. As long as it's away! [...] From there I can read all about Nigeria from a distance. It will all be like fiction and won't hurt much.' (1966, 199-200)

Crusoe travels to accumulate, and because he can. Iska, on the other hand, seeks migration as something like Rosa's journey to the fifth floor of the hotel from which she looks down at the desolation below, as a space for perspective, as a search for somewhere from which the crazy contemporary reality of Nigeria will become literally readable.

It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. (Said, 1991, 93)

In a sense Iska's request *is* for a migrancy-as-vision, but it is less a search for epiphany, more the desire for simple coherence. Within a few pages she is dead, killed in a kidnapping that Ekwensi refuses to explain. In the light of Iska's declaration here, the indecipherable nature of her death does not appear as the abrupt conclusion of a stranded author. It takes on, instead, a painful inevitability. It is, like the world she had already diagnosed, unreadable. Colonial capitalism, as Said has been instrumental in arguing, travelled with the confidence of reading other places as textual spaces. Part of its bitterly ironic historical result, in Ekwensi's presentation, is the feeling for its inheritors that they need to travel outwards in order to read *their own homes* as texts. All things in history, as Marx qualified Hegel to say, happen twice: once as tragedy and then as farce.

What Barber argues in her essay on the popular representations of oil-boom wealth is that the occult tropes employed in the plays she studied helped make sense of an inexplicable system. In this respect, they had come to operate as a kind of surrogate ideology. In a social context where the traditional, rural equation of reward to hard work, and the colonially inculcated capitalist spirit - which makes much the

same promise - are exposed as implausible, the figure of the occult thief enables an explanation of the distribution of massive wealth into limited hands (Barber, 1982; see also Haynes and Okome, 1998; Lawuyi, 1997; Sekoni, 1997). What I want to suggest here is that the coercive and illegitimate appropriations of wealth in oil-boom Nigeria should not be seen to represent, as liberal theory would have us believe, a distortion or a malformation of capitalism, but something closer to its naked, exposed face.⁷ In this respect Iska's desire to travel so that 'It will all be like fiction and won't hurt much' is precisely about moving to a space where the old lie of the system - to those who work hardest shall it be given - can be believed again. What Ekwensi implies very starkly, and in a way that poses the most pertinent questions to a comfortable correlation of migrancy and vision, is that the desire to leave Africa may relate sometimes to the desire to find a place where the comforting fiction of capitalism, its basic doxa of effort and remuneration, can be accepted once again. As a questionnaire respondent put it, asked about the idea that the West represented a 'promised land':

The difference between those countries and our is that they love their country and would do anything to see it grow in all sectors and they reward anyone who is a party to this growth, they don't believe in greed but reward.

(Female, student, 21-35, M: school teacher, F: engineer)

This chapter shifts the focus of the thesis from a theorisation of the production of cultural goods to a reading of texts themselves. This introductory example helps make clear that what remains at issue is the recent critical valorisation of migrancy and how much this tendency leaves unsaid.

⁷ Marx, we might remember, pointed out that it was in the colonies that the 'beautiful illusion' of liberal political economy was 'torn aside' (Marx, 1990, 935) and 'the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country' (932) are thereby exposed, although it should be pointed out that he is here speaking specifically about the settler colonies.

Alienation in Nigerian fiction.

S. E. Ogude it is who argues that there is a peculiar 'burden of history' (1990, 3-14; 1991, 1-9) that bears upon African anglophone writing. He draws a deliberate parallel between early migrant African writers such as Equiano and Sancho - whose trajectory emerges from the slave trade - and the contemporary exodus of African intellectuals to the north and west. His point in doing so is to insist that modern African writing faces in its own roots a genesis of enforced alienation, slavery and loss. This history, he argues, underlies a great deal of the contemporary literary aesthetics of writing from the continent. Paul Gilroy, more famously and more fully, has developed a thesis that occasionally comes close to Ogude's (1993: 18, 56, 72-3) but which is much more embracing of the 'rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural' (4) which is the putative outcome of this history and therefore of its cultural expressions. It is notable that these two critics approach the same argument in such different tenors, given that one is working from the context of continental African experience, the other from a theory of a black Atlantic which deliberately brackets that experience outside of its argument.

This section is intended, at least in part, as a substantiation of comments in the previous chapter about the degree to which Nigerian writing has focused on the dual thematic of alienation-migration, especially that of the westernised intellectual. While I do not subscribe to the full strength of Ogude's thesis, it is hard to disagree that both explicitly in terms of thematics and implicitly in terms of narrative form anglophone Nigerian fiction has returned often to this agonised question. There is a great deal that could be said about this in relation to Achebe's sequence of novels, especially if

Ngugi's hints about the metamorphosis of the messenger class are taken into account.⁸ Exile is the crucial tragic motor in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* and this relates importantly to the more modern exile of Obi in *No Longer at Ease*. Achebe, I would argue, is quite deliberate in substituting Obi's expatriate education for the administrative cells which are the representative sites of alienation to Okonkwo and Ezeulu. The sense of the intellectual's severance from home is a question resolved bitterly in *A Man of the People* with the implication that the elite are genuinely reflective of the population, the leaders that the masses deserve. *Anthills of the Savannah* offers a more hopeful, if ambiguous position, and this, along with its attempt to recognise a new female role, a more multivocal narrative voice and its critique of elitism make it a crucial novel. However, much has already been written about Achebe, often in particular relation to these questions, and so it may be more productive to refer the reader to this material and to try to trace a path through some other work.⁹

Having said that, I do want to start with another very familiar text, Soyinka's 'unintended happening'¹⁰: *The Interpreters*. It might be that this label offers the reader something of a get-out clause, allowing the book's narrative indirection and portrayal of alienation to be dismissed as the expected result of a poet-dramatist's occasional novel, a predictable formal weakness, the predominance of language and character over action. It would be a comforting evasion because, passages of comic satire

⁸ It is Ngugi's suggestion (1997, 19-27; see also 1998) that there is great significance in Achebe's decision to have Okonkwo kill a court messenger rather than avenge himself directly upon the colonial administrator. This might be read as an attack on those who became the translator category that Fanon discusses, the origins of the comprador neo-colonial rulers. Presumably it also opens the question of whether or not there is some expiation being enacted by Achebe in relation to his own roots as a anglophone writer.

⁹ On Achebe see for example: Rhoads, 1993; Irele, 1979; Booth, 1981, chapter 4; Tibble, 1971; Gakwandi, 1977, chapter 2; Innes, 1990; Oyeleye, 1991; Povey, 1972; Omotoso, 1996; Maja-Pearce, 1992, chapters 1 and 2; Schulze-Engler, 1991; Killam, 1976, Mezu, 2000, Griswold, 2000.

notwithstanding, Soyinka's is the bleakest of the first generation Nigerian novels. Bleak not because of failures in construction but because it faces so insistently the crisis of intellectual alienation and the relative ineffectuality of art. Bleak also because its characters regularly return to tropes of disgust and despair with regard to the world about them.¹¹

The Interpreters opens at a frontier, at a pivotal moment as one of the number, Egbo, tries to make the impossible, and in this case literal, navigation between past and future, between his inheritance as 'warlord of the creeks'¹² and his job in the civil service 'propping up the herald-men of the future.' (1965, 12-13) This stasis, a moment of choosing, takes place in a canoe as Egbo and friends paddle towards the village of his home. The book is saturated with water imagery and it is particularly important in this opening section as, on a river boundary, Egbo hesitates and finally sets a motif for the remainder of the novel by deciding to go 'with the tide.' (13) Which means, at that moment, a turn back, unwillingly and without commitment towards the 'dull grey filing cabinets of the Foreign office.' (12) The voyage of the urbanite back to rural roots is a scene much staged in Nigerian fiction but here it freezes at the interstice, drifts in irresolution. The frontier that has opened up between the city intellectual and their own past seems threateningly wide, just as it does in Iyayi's bitter but comic story 'Flora's Reply' (1996, 175-196) or Ogboli's 'The Cautious Receiver'. (1997-1998, unpublished) The other interpreters find themselves

¹⁰ Soyinka, whose work is primarily in poetry and drama, has said in interview: 'I don't consider myself a novelist. The first novel happened purely by accident. In fact I used to refer to it purely as a 'happening.'" (Wilkinson, 1992, 102)

¹¹ Whoever else can claim a place in its literary lineage *The Interpreters* certainly echoes the Faulknerian mix of beauty and loathing as well as that author's fascination with disassociated, migrant characters. This reading gains credence in the clear correspondence between Joe Christmas in Faulkner's *Light in August* and Soyinka's Joe Golder. The former, in the context of the rigidly defined racial boundaries, filled with anguish at his invisible blackness, the latter equally despairing precisely because his blackness is so invisible. They would make a very relevant set of fictional case studies for Fanon's thesis in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

¹² That is to say, accepting the inheritance of his grandfather's chieftenship.

in similarly un-negotiable spaces. Sagoe, for example, caught between an equal disgust for the filth of the poor and the extravagance of the rich. Soyinka symbolises this in deliberate juxtapositions, both sides of which repel Sagoe: on the one hand the crude eleven man funeral procession of an impoverished cult member and on the other the three and a half hour 'self-repeating glory' (112) of Sir Derinola's wake. The novel is a topography of a liminal, disassociative space, of an absurdity and aporia in which the characters are stranded.

In this vision of alienation art is possessed of ambivalent possibilities. On the one hand it seems to exist only as consolation for the failures of more pragmatic action. So Sekoni, whose engineering project is mothballed by the machinery of endemic corruption turns his anger into an act of sculpture. Powerful, even visionary, but nevertheless born of frustration, an act parallel to Sagoe's 'voidanting'¹³ of synthetic fruit at an expatriate party. On the other hand, it is clear that Soyinka does not give up on the potential of human creativity. For it is only in Kola's pantheon, the vast canvas he works on throughout the novel, that some gesture towards unity of past and present is made. Flawed it may be, and perhaps in Kola's dissection of its inadequacies we can hear Soyinka's own voice, but at least the attempt is made. Disalienation, as Fanon argued (1967, 224 forwards), is a problem of time, of reforming a significant, live connection between past and present, and this is just Kola's struggle. Yet nevertheless, it is clear that art, at least *this art*, is closer to a private retreat than an instrument of public insurgency. The canvas displays, finally, record of a personal battle to a select audience and comes closer, therefore, to Mrs. Dalloway

¹³ Sagoe's philosophy of voidancy is a kind of metaphysics of expulsion related to the act of shitting and it returns thematically throughout the novel. As Gakwandi argues, the shit-imagery becomes a metaphor for the decadence of the system, voidancy a kind of personal act of revenge or catharsis. In the episode referred to, Sagoe, drunk and gatecrashing an expatriate party is so disgusted by the artificiality of the plastic fruit decorating the house that he proceeds to throw them from a window. (See Gakwandi, 1977, chapter 4)

than to the play-within-a-novel of Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) or even Soyinka's own shotgun sketches.¹⁴ The only suggestion of the intellectual politically interacting with a wider world is in the parody of Sagoë spreading his philosophy of voidancy to the office janitor Mathias. At the last there is little hope on offer, the final lines prove unremittingly dark. The opening took place on a river and aimed, futilely, towards some sort of meaningful choice. But at least Egbo could opt for travel with the tide, for apostasy. The book ends on a despairing reassessment, that there is only 'a choice of a man drowning [...] only like a choice of drowning.' (251) Jeyifo (Introduction to Soyinka, 1993) argues that Soyinka's vision is at its least hopeful in the piece 'The Writer in a Modern African State.' *The Interpreters* is very much the fictional companion piece to that pessimistic essay.

Bourdieu begins his analysis of *Sentimental Education* with the extraordinary statement that an internal reading of that novel reveals the structure of the social space in which Flaubert was also situated. In other words, that in an internal reading a sociological reading is also available. The same possibility, it seems to me, might be suggested of Soyinka's classic work. Although the analogy is not without problems, he too constructs a field of social forces and like Flaubert, launches five characters 'like particles into a force-field [...] their trajectories [to be] determined by the relation between the forces of the field and their own inertia.' (Bourdieu, 1996, 9) The delimitation of the position in which Frédéric finds himself, as made by Bourdieu, seems apposite as a description of the interpreters, especially Egbo:

A potential bourgeois and a provisional intellectual [...] he is predisposed to indeterminacy by this double contradictory determination: placed at the centre of a field of forces owing its

¹⁴ Iyayi's powerful scene, borrowing from *Hamlet*, has his novel's central figure, Idemudia, watching a play staged while he is in hospital. (182-197) The play itself presents the trial of various 'violent' men arguing that the violence visited upon them by an unjust system has first responsibility for their subsequent behaviour. Later in the book Idemudia remembers the play and begins to recuperate the terminology of violence to understand and describe his own position (251).

structure to the opposition between the pole of economic or political power and the pole of intellectual or artistic prestige [...] he is situated in a *zone of social weightlessness*. (Bourdieu, 1996, 12, my italics)

Of course, the social forces that structure the field in which the interpreters exist are crucially different from those of Flaubert's France. As Adebayo Williams (1998) makes clear in his analysis of the position of Nigerian intellectuals under Babangida, and as was argued in the previous chapter, the neocolonial situation warps the Nigerian field of cultural production and indeed the wider field of power with a third pole of western commercial and political influence. Nevertheless, the 'zone of social weightlessness' describes succinctly the predicament of Soyinka's characters. Apostasy: a refusal to play the game, the refusal to stand, it is the leitmotif of the book.¹⁵ All of which is so ambiguously encapsulated in the duality of the title: both the optimistic possibility of an *interpretation* of the past for the contemporary world and a pessimistic reference to the very *interpreter* class which Ngugi and Fanon describe as the necessary operating condition of colonialism and thus the historical forerunners of today's elite.

In *Ìsarà*, (1990) Soyinka's more personal and less bereft consideration of the past there are still moments when the new generation, the 'ex-Ilés',¹⁶ become suddenly aware of a sense of severance. Gathered back home, returned to the collective sender, the group find themselves surprised at night by an unfamiliar sound which they finally recognise, 'through the distance of childhood', as the voice of the oro. One of them asks: 'Have we really become such total expatriates?' (449) In this fictionalised piece of history, however, Soyinka is much more explicit about the kind of economic pressure which makes this dislocation a necessity:

¹⁵ Sekoni is the only insistent advocate of an aesthetics of unity, of the 'dome of continuity.' But his determined sense of totality, so parallel to Soyinka's own, comes up hard against the fracturing reality of capitalist modernity.

Ìsarà was bereft of choice; she pushed out her sons and daughters, firstly to be trained, then to earn a living. The aridity was all-embracing; Ìsarà could not provide a living. The starkness of it shook him. (461)

It is an important recognition. Often in *The Interpreters* alienation becomes a thing of metaphysics, the kind of modernist angst for which Achebe once criticised Armah (Achebe, 1975, 25-7). But Soyinka's suggestion of a much more materially determining imperative underlying the question of migrancy brings me on to Kole Omotoso's short novel *Sacrifice* (1974). Again the title is revealing. Omotoso's book circles around a painful dialectic in the nature of sacrifice, in the relation between the past and present. Talking of his mother, Dr. Siwaju says:

She sacrificed *her* present so that he could have a future, she had to forego many things so that he might go many places. (41)

But sacrifice, as Mauss knew, places obligation even while it provides. Siwaju does 'go many places', as does Seven in *Memories of Our Recent Boom* (Omotoso, 1982). Consequently, however, both characters find their return troubled by the sense that the present owes itself, irredeemably, to the past. The book pictures a trajectory that can never reconcile itself to its own history. The position is inherently ironic because old origins continually intrude in their full incongruity and with demanding obligations onto a present that can neither deny nor satisfy them. Omotoso is a master at figuring these ironies. When Siwaju's unknown father dies his skeleton is stripped down to become a demonstration piece in the doctor's own hospital. The intellectual, unknowingly, plies a trade on the bones of their own history.

Superficially therefore, *Sacrifice* asks the question: 'Must the past be destroyed to permit the present to survive?' (37-8). But in a real sense it faces a less grandiose and more urgent point. It is specifically the *commodification* of the past that

¹⁶ The title is a play on words, Ilesa being the site of St. Simeon Teacher Training Seminary. Ex-Ilé referring then to both an old alma mater and, perhaps consequently, the sense of exile.

Mary represents and from which Siwaju cannot escape. It is his mother's prostitution which pays for his own training as a gynaecologist and so there is a circle made complete when he turns to find himself facing her in the examination cubicle of a VD unit. It is an impossible position and as with Achebe's unwritten middle novel Siwaju says: 'No, I can't.' (36) The aporia is in the fact that his mother confronts him as the *very condition of his own existence* as a Westernised intellectual. Biologically of course, but also in the marketing of herself. There are truths about one's position, to paraphrase Bourdieu, that can only be said in such a way that they are not said. In the end it is the insistent physicality of Omotoso's imagery that prevents the book slipping into mere symbolism, or, as it occasionally threatens, Freudian allegory. Primarily, as he insists, this is a material dilemma and indeed a question of class mobility.

Much has been written about the double-sight of the migrant. But for Siwaju, returning to Africa, Western-trained, double-sight is tragic and estranging.

From rag [sic] to riches in three generations. He was just the second generation. He must see both the rags and the riches. If only he could burn the rags, never set his eyes on them again. (12-13)

The returning migrant intellectual here is indeed faced with the exposure of contingency, but *not* in the sense of recognising the processual, non-necessary nature of identity. Rather Siwaju is exposed to the very necessary and specific material conditions of his location as a member of the emergent elite. Later, in terms that recall an old epiphany of Okonkwo's,¹⁷ he asks the question another way:

Can we really cut ourselves from the ashes from which we rose, and float, lone black cloud-wise, away from it all. My answer is no. We cannot leave it behind. We must take our litter home. (77)

¹⁷ At the point in *Things Fall Apart* at which Nwoye's acceptance of the new Christian dispensation finally and irrecoverably alienates him from his father, Okonkwo has a vision of himself as 'living fire' giving rise to Nwoye 'cold, impotent ash' (Achebe, 1958, 110-111).

Underneath the rhetoric of responsibility, however, there are lurking references of dismissal: 'our litter.' Omotoso further complicates this by raising questions about the inter-relation of gender and class. 'Men', Mary has already suggested, are 'those creatures who absconded from responsibilities.' (18) *Sacrifice* ends as despairingly as anything Soyinka has written. Siwaju does take his litter home. His mother, like Chiaku in Munonye's *The Only Son* (1966), another background text here, begins to face a kind of madness and wakes, locked in a cupboard by her own child. She finally hangs herself, a prior attempt at electrocution foiled by a power-cut: 'She couldn't make it out in the new way. She would have to make it out in the old way.' (116) In the concluding chapter Omotoso details all the grotesque excesses of the funeral and Siwaju's 'handsome profit' (123) on the gifts brought by mourners. It is, like Ogboli's 'A Day in Town' (unpublished, 1997), a very dark lesson in the disavowal of class origins.

Narrative indirection and the 'literature of despair'.

It is suggested above that one of the paradoxes of Crusoe's predicament, and perhaps this is so apparent that we actually forget to see it, lies in his very strandedness. Here, to repeat, is a fictional archetype of capitalist expansion, and yet the narrative itself is extraordinarily enclosed once it arrives on the island. Again there is a dialectical quality to this fact. Migrancy and alienation, movement and stasis, trajectory and aporia: sometimes *at the level of form* fiction makes a powerful social testament.

This is certainly the case with what Stephanie Newell calls the 'literature of despair' (1998a, 289-314), a term she coins in reference to recent Nigerian pamphlet fiction. Representing young Nigerian men in a ruthless urban world, these popular productions are caught between a refusal to condone the crimes to which their

protagonists resort, and an inability to condemn them because there is no plausibly representable alternative. The usual formal conclusion then is for the (anti-)hero to succumb to corruption and face death, either by their own hand or that of another character. The 'symbolic economies' of these fictions, Newell argues, are bearing witness to a real social impasse, the sense of the impossible nature of legitimate wealth as described by Barber in the essay cited above (1982).

In widening the frame of reference to include more culturally consecrated writing, it becomes clear that this genre of despair, this formal stagnation, has some prevalence in second and third generation Nigerian anglophone literary fiction.¹⁸ Take, for example, Femi Olugbile's *Batolica* (1995), in many ways a remarkably radical book, opening as it does with the declaration of an independent socialist state on the campus of Ile-Ife University. Yet from this opening springs forth nothing. Just as the revolution fails to leave the campus, the narrative fails to move beyond the circling internal monologues of its central characters: DD, the doubting theorist; KK, the single minded activist who becomes a repressive leader; Olabintan, the voice of reason; Anata, the rather token woman and Banji the machiavellian schemer. Near the conclusion of the novel, Anata says: 'All my life has been beginnings. I could never see a plot through.' (227) Her words echo, unintentionally or otherwise, DD's own comments on the fact that *Batolica* has not become the political epidemic that was envisaged, that it has borne no contagion beyond the limits of its academic confinement. The putative revolution collapses into itself, he recognises, because in the Nigeria of 'abiku nationhood', there have already been so many new starts that the very meaning of the term has been evacuated: 'The answer, he concluded, was that there had been too many false beginnings. Too many.' (215)

The failure of the revolutionary plot and the failure of the fictional plot in which it is putatively imagined come together in DD's comments, licensing for the reader the possibility that this narrative indirection is reflective of the social impossibility of imagining how an alternative to the incumbent regime might emerge. The cumulative effect of all this renders rather bleak the conclusion of the novel, in which the chant 'Batolica' goes up among the school-children of the town in defiance of the soldiery. How, after all, are we to read this except as just another opening? It seems as futile an optimism as the conclusion of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. (1973)¹⁹ For all the interest of its Marxist ruminations Oluigbile's novel reveals a feeling of left-wing intellectual seclusion and despair at the impossibility of drastic social change against a political backdrop of aborted democracy and recurrent new starts. Formally speaking - I mean this literally: what the form speaks of - *Batolica* is the novel of a radicalism whose language of new beginnings and revolution has been co-opted by conservative, and often repressive forces.²⁰

This narrative indirection however, is not confined to left-wing fiction. Abubakar Gimba's novel *Footprints* (1998) presents an entangled domestic drama between two households: that of Jibrán, an ex-student activist, and that of his one time friend and now security force agent, Muhtar. Although the general sympathy of the book appears to be with the less conservative characters like Jibrán's daughter Farah, the narrative is interspersed with lengthy political discussions between the major figures which take place in an unreal, rarefied atmosphere, a kind of suspended animation. The political events shaking the country are calmly dissected like

¹⁸ Wendy Griswold has discussed this kind of novel in specific relation to the 'disappointed young man' (2000, 222-225), whose educational achievements leave him with aspirations which the social context forestall at every turn. See chapter five of this thesis for a broader discussion.

¹⁹ After the horrific passage of that novel Ofeyi leaves with the comatose body of his quest-object (Iriyise) in his arms. The book ends 'In the forests, life began to stir.' (320) It is very hard, after the apocalyptic journey that has preceded, to read the line with anything other than a sense of bathos.

cadavers. These debates are familiar from Gimba's earlier novel *Sunset for a Mandarin* (1991). As there, the author is scrupulously careful to ensure that the sophistry is balanced, so that even though there is clearly an attack intended on the cycle of coup and counter-coup, the military head of state is generously portrayed. (294)

Gimba is at pains to relate the domestic action of the narrative to the wider public subjects of discussion, even though this is achieved only through the most extraordinary contrivances of character placement and co-incidence. Jibrán's son, Haliyfah, for example, becomes implausibly involved in a student demonstration and is framed by Muhtar's own child, Bakri, who also works for the security forces and has had his earlier romantic overture to Farah rejected. The cast of characters and indeed the whole drama Gimba puts in play is a calculated attempt to portray issues of national politics through a domestic lens. It is a project, admittedly, which is often undermined by the implausible fictional devices needed to operate the author's non-committal, political even-handedness.²¹

The book both starts and ends with a coup, with the same martial music occurring on the radio. Jibrán says to his wife at the conclusion:

I only feel greatly disturbed and concerned for the children. We are leaving confused footprints for them to follow. They wouldn't know which direction is the way forward. (307)

²⁰ As far as I am aware the only discussion of *Batolica* currently in the western academic press is the brief review in *Exile and African Literature* (Shoga, 2000, 127-129).

²¹ Gimba's writing is, I would suggest, very much in the tradition of another civil-servant and author: T.M. Aluko, whose later novels, unlike the early satire of *One Man, One Wife* (1959), lose all narrative momentum (see Booth, 1981, 82-92). Mazrui argues that the African intellectual may find themselves close to the arena of politics simply by virtue of less clearly stratified sub-divisions within the elite (1978; see also Mutiso, 1974; Williams, 1998). It is certainly true that both Aluko and Gimba accord with Bourdieu's description of 'the case of writers who are most visibly subject to external necessities - those exercised by political powers[.]' (1996, 221) Certainly *Wrong Ones in the Dock* (1982) and *Conduct Unbecoming* (1992) – both offer a promise of critical intent which is never fulfilled, partly because they become a defence of the position of the civil service.

His words, like those of DD in *Batolica*, have a deeper resonance than that which is available in their immediate context, echoing the reader's sense at that moment that the book has literally gone nowhere. That it has, like its repeated discussions, merely orbited a problem without ever calculating an escape trajectory. That said, this is the case only at one level. While the social backcloth to the novel simply inaugurates a new cycle, there is the possibility that the household dispute between the two families will be resolved. The expedient by which this might be achieved is revealing. Muhtar's daughter, Jameelah, ends the narrative as she has spent much of its duration: a notable absence, overseas in the UK. She writes to Haliyfah in the last pages asking if he would like to join her there for a holiday. It is in this promise of migration, then, that some kind of unity between the families becomes realisable. What is less obvious, perhaps, is the intriguing mutation of an old fictional tactic here. The secreted character who emerges from the wings bringing resolution in their wake is a familiar one, part indeed of Propp's *Morphology of the Folk-Tale* (1968 [1928]). But the case here is almost inverted: Jameelah does not return at the very end, she remains off-stage. In this respect, the promise lies, not so much in the *returning* of the prodigal as in the potential of the space of their prodigality itself. Were she to emerge at the death she too would be caught up in the new cycle of false beginnings. It becomes necessary within the imaginative structure of the novel itself that she remains outside and in so doing she offers, not resolution but rather the lure of re-inaugurated fictional movement. With this, the site of potential narrative development is shifted to the elsewhere.²²

Said and Spivak have both famously examined the way in which certain key texts of the European literary canon use references to the colonies to consolidate and

²² As Brennan has said, it is a key characteristic of much post-colonial fiction that it is expected to take on board the image of the West as space of true democracy (1989, 2-5). This is very much Gimba's

ensure their representation of a closed domestic order (e.g. Said on *Mansfield Park*, 1993, 95-116; Spivak on *Jane Eyre*, 1999, 112-131). *Footprints* it seems, has the same kind of inverted relationship to this tactic that I have suggested exists between *Iska* and *Robinson Crusoe*. There is, in other words, a relation to explore here between narrative form and social structure, although we settle much too easily if we take this to imply just a matter of flat reflection or mimesis. A more complex and valuable account is certainly available in Macherey's idea that literature, as 'determinate illusion' (1978, 64) inevitably exposes the nature of its own determinations. In particular, Macherey argues, fiction is a work on language, and therefore on the basic material of ideology. Because of its *secondariness*, because each story is finite, it offers a stalled, interrupted image of ideology. This occurs not directly, but in terms of what the literary work finds to be unspeakable. In short: in its silences, the text presents the reader with a brief glimpse of the aporia of ideology.

The work is perhaps a mirror precisely because it registers the partiality of its own reflections, the incomplete reality of simple elements [...] the literary work is *simultaneously* [...] a reflection and an absence of a reflection. (122, 128)

Clearly the determinate absence of *Footsteps* lies in the stalling of narrative development. One could make this argument too simplistically, but given that the novel clearly reaches for a 'state of the nation' sensibility, it does not seem to be too dramatic a critical step to suggest that what is revealed here is the silent truth about the ideology of national development in its more general political usage. If, as Berger argues, the simulated futures of commodity advertising provide surrogate, sedative images for a population largely alienated from any obtainable sense of future self (1972, chapter 7; see also the following chapter's discussion of 'future time' in Bourdieu), it is the rhetoric of the developing nation that has filled this void at the

usage here.

level of many *national* narratives.²³ In this respect, I suggest, the stagnation in Gimba's novel is offering a very powerful formal witness, even beyond its authorial intention.

How, then, do we understand the fact that Gimba is required to displace the resolution of his work, just as Iska reaches for the same displacement in order to make Nigerian reality readable? The denouement that he implies (which is, in some senses, a beginning) falls outside the conditions of the work's speech, into what Macherey tentatively calls its unconscious. Overtly, *Footsteps* appears to imply that a step out of difficult historical circumstances can be a way forwards, towards resolution and development. But the logic of his non-progressing story and its finale also suggests, with all of fiction's ability to mould a 'cast of an absence' that migration and national stagnation have an unspoken ideological relationship. Of course this is not in any sense a hidden fact, the brain-drain and a growing diasporan population are topics well debated in the Nigerian press, but what I mean to demonstrate here is how these social facts find covert echoes in the structures of recent fiction. Firstly, Halifyfah's trip abroad is to be paid for by an unseen and wealthy friend. Secondly, although his concluding displacement resolves the tension between the two families that has structured the domestic narrative of the novel, this resolution is achieved only by finally decoupling the relationship between domestic and public-political events that the author has been at such pains to establish.

One of the crude 'new economies of migration' (Masset and others, 1996, 181-216) has argued that the crucial unit in studying migrancy is the family. It

²³ As Obasanjo's democracy has brought with it at least some welcome freedoms, it has also seen a rise in neo-liberal rhetoric. Increasingly the old syntax of 'development' has been superceded by such new mutations as typified by: 'the desire to rebrand Nigeria as a country to do business with[.]' (*World Report: Nigeria*, 2000, 2). (*World Report* was a colour supplement, distributed with *The Independent* (March 11th, 2000). It gave a bright, rose-tinted account of Nigeria under the new president and a

suggests, in an analysis unencumbered by reality, that a household will rationalise its economic need and ‘invest’ a member overseas in an attempt to stabilise local income. The tactic at the conclusion of *Footsteps* is oddly like a fictional version of this neo-classical ‘human capital’ model, made in symbolic rather than economic terms and aiming for a narrative rather than economic expansion. In both cases the summoning of capital as a resolving deus ex machina is as easy as it can be only in the imagination. In both cases, equally, the wider politics of society fall into shadow as the domestic realm is foregrounded. Reading *Footprints* here, with the same kind of effort that Marx suggests for *Crusoe*, it is possible to say at the very least that the novel problematises the valorising of migrancy in recent western theory.

All of this section has, in some sense, been about what cannot be said, cannot be written. This has another, more direct side to it. As Olu Obafemi has recently suggested, echoing Philip Roth’s one-time comments on contemporary America²⁴:

Given the sheer feat of fictionality that our nation’s present day history has acquired, people of the creative and imaginative guild may soon need a new profession [...] creative writers [are being] assailed by the reality of a society that has out-fictioned fiction. (Obafemi, 1999)

Perhaps, in a sense, this was Marx’s point about capitalist society also as he reached continuously for occult imagery to describe obtaining social relations, revealing the root irrationality and insanity of the system. Certainly in some recent Nigerian fiction the ‘literature of despair’ takes another form. Lack of space prevents any detailed analysis here, but in the darkest sections of Nwagboso’s *A Message from the Madhouse* (1991) and Nkala’s *Drums and the Voice of Death* (1996), there is a

putatively objective statement in favour of further deregulation and the accelerated privatisation of state industries.

²⁴ ‘[T]he American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make *credible* much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meagre imagination.’ (Roth, 1990 [1961], 29) We might recall also that Obafemi’s comments echo what Achebe wrote some time before in *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1983).

feeling of the utter inadequacy of a mimetic project. Nwagboso's novel in particular, playing as it does with a mad narrator, seems to ask what kind of voice can bear the weight of events in military run Nigeria. These novels, which might be called 'middle-brow', mixing T.S. Eliot and Achebe with thriller conventions and chauvinistic clichés, are correspondent in many ways with Bandele-Thomas' dark, carnival grotesque in *The Man Who Came In From the Back of Beyond* (1991) and especially *The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams* (1991). Bandele also, in his continual multiplication of narrative levels and multiple, unreliable narrators, seems to be asking the same questions. More recently, Okey Ndibe has taken the thematic of the narrator whose madness is a witness to truth and mixed into it recollections of Soyinka's prison narrative *The Man Died* (1972), to produce the powerful novel *Arrows of Rain* (2000).

Migrancy in women's writing.

I have argued as a deliberate counter-position to the optimistic presentation of migrancy in some postcolonial theory that the relationship between migrancy and capitalist alienation needs to be borne in mind. This does not mean, of course, that a situation of exile, of expatriate status or travel, presents only a homogenous experience of severance and loss. A collection of studies edited by Gina Buijs shows the degree to which migrancy can hold for women both constraining and emancipating possibilities, sometimes simultaneously. According to Eastmond's (1993) study of Chilean refugees living within the USA, exile presented women with increased access to a market for their labour and often, therefore, a new degree of personal economic freedom and a public role. This contrasted, she suggests, with their

prior status within Chile which had, at least to some extent, positioned them as adjuncts to a largely male-dominated political culture. By contrast Abdulrahim's (1993) examination of Palestinian refugees in Berlin suggests a polar opposite result of expatriate life for women. The refusal of a right to work for asylum seekers in Germany gave rise to a constant male presence within the domestic environment which curbed and curtailed the limited spaces of manoeuvre and freedom to which women had traditionally had access. Furthermore, as she, and others including Kandiyoti (1994) and Yuval-Davis (1997) have argued, women have often been ascribed a kind of symbolic labour, whereby they are expected to embody a domestic, pristine image of cultural identity. In the context of exile this gendered position may become extremely significant for group cohesion and correspondingly constraining for those allotted the role of its 'embodiment'. It is in this respect that George (1996) points out the correspondence between narratives of the national home, and images of a feminised domestic home.²⁵ Spivak, already cited, has written powerfully on the degree to which the subaltern female subject has been made to 'speak' in service of various stories of national liberation, modernisation or traditionalism (1997, 145-165; 1987, chapter 12).

More than any other Nigerian writer perhaps, Buchi Emecheta's work has provided a fictional record of the migrant's 'bequest of confusion'²⁶ and the

²⁵ The position of women in the context of large scale male outmigration is a related one. Skar (1993, 21-33) has shown the degree to which Quecha women, whose herding work already ties them symbolically to the land, are expected to remain 'at home' while husbands and sons travel to find labour in the Peruvian lowlands. While this offers, Skar suggests, substantial freedom to women, it is important to recognise that the access to migration is a kind of capital in its own right. According to Okoko's study of the Nigerian delta, an increasing number of women act as household heads while men move out of an area environmentally and socially disrupted by mineral extraction. In this case the women in question have found themselves caught between a need to discover new forms of productive labour and the traditional gendered allocation of labour roles which prevent them adopting many of the activities formerly held by their husbands (1999, 373-378).

²⁶ I borrow the phrase from Dinah Anuli Butler's poem on being born to a white mother by an absent Nigerian father. A different situation to Emecheta's, but the phrase from *to my Father* is apt: '...should I bring you fine children / and tears crusting salt tracks / or the anger of a stale betrayal to / keep you on

ambivalent possibilities it offers women. *Kehinde* (1994) is particularly interesting in this regard. It brings into confluence the autobiographical style of Emecheta's earlier work (e.g. *In the Ditch* (1979 [1972]) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974)) and a more symbolic, magic-realist overlay. Emecheta presents a central character haunted by the presence of two other women: her dead twin - Taiwo - and her mother. Here, as in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1988 [1979]) where she uses the same kind of device, these internal voices are paradoxical. Kehinde's Taiwo is both presence and absence at once, a critical commentary and the mark of incompleteness, independence on the one hand, loneliness on the other. As the birth of a child starts to separate her from her closest friend this becomes clearer:

It heightened Kehinde's sense of her own isolation, her feeling of being marginal to everyone else's lives. Because of this, Taiwo's voice was strong within her, articulating her vaguely acknowledged fears.
(46)

The novel charts Kehinde's negotiations over the question of home. Her husband, Albert, frustrated by a reliance on his wife's income, insists on repatriating his family to Nigeria, forcing Kehinde to give up her work in a bank. Left in Britain to sell their house, Kehinde finds that without her husband she is suddenly pushed towards 'the hem of existence' (58), old friends apparently ignoring her. Yet on returning to Nigeria, she is equally marginalised. Her husband has taken a second wife and she, without a separate source of income, is deprived of that romantic vision of companionate marriage which she had clung to in the past. Earlier, one of Albert's male friends has despairingly agreed with him that 'Women rule in this country [the UK].' (15) With a deliberate parallel, Emecheta has Kehinde write from Nigeria saying: 'It is a man's world here.' (94) Between these apparently clear cut statements, however, Emecheta complicates the picture. Kehinde meets women marginalised in

the cold side of a shuttered moment / for I cannot hide / in luscious Nigeria imagined / tied to a

Britain and experiences the degradation of the largely feminised low grade labour in the hotel sector. Equally in Nigeria she encounters what she calls 'the spirit trapped behind the veneer of tradition' (106): independently minded women pushing at the boundaries that surround them.

For all the fraught questions of cultural belonging and tradition however, home is finally a matter of property and this is one of the novel's important implications. The legal status of joint property ownership is foregrounded in the first pages as a key reason for Albert's desire to return to Africa: 'He was not unaware of the legal status of a wife here in Britain. In Nigeria, the home belonged to the man'.

(4) So, when Kehinde leaves him to his younger wife and returns to London we get this crucial scene:

Kehinde dipped her hand into her coat pocket and brought out the front door key. When it fitted, she was surprised. [...] Before she could suppress it, a voice inside her sang out, 'Home, sweet home!' Taiwo, who had not spoken to her since she had gone to Nigeria, was back. Kehinde rebuked the voice: 'This is not my home. Nigeria is my home.' As she said it, she knew she was deceiving herself. [...] The For Sale sign flapped forlornly in the wind. Something propelled her back outside, and with unexpected strength she wrenched it from the ground. 'This house is not for sale,' she declared. 'This house is mine.' (107-8)

For all the cultural accoutrements and symbolism with which the idea of home is invested, it has a very material fact of property ownership and the right to abode at its base. It is important, therefore, and wholly apposite, that the novel ends with Kehinde rebuffing her son's claim to be considered the new, masculine head of the household. She concludes by saying to her Taiwo: 'Claiming my right does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman.' (141) ²⁷

wishworld by your / bequest of confusion.' (in Grewal (ed.), 1988, 224-5)

²⁷ It is this concrete focus in the novel which makes problematic a reading such as is offered by Arce (2000, 77-89), and which takes Kehinde as the fictional objectification of Bhabha's archetypal, migrant for whom all homes are 'uncanny' and incomplete.

Caren Kaplan (1990) has written about the use of homelessness as a description for the marginality of women's social position. She urges on western feminism the need to 'de-territorialize' itself, to abandon the comfortable 'homes' of its subject positions, recognising the fact that these might be founded in repression in the way Terrborg-Penn, for example, has historically demonstrated (1998).²⁸ Emecheta's work, however, like Rosi Braidotti's (1992) discussion of the 'metaphor of exile', poses questions about exactly how appropriate such a call is. On the one hand, as Swaisland (1993) has shown, the leaving of one's national territory has sometimes been precisely the mechanism *by which* western women have been able to achieve new liberties *on* the back of new oppressions. Colonial history suggests starkly that the leaving of home guarantees very little as far as the reduction of repression is concerned. In the case examined by Swaisland, British female domestic workers in the late nineteenth century were able to make a leap in class status by travelling to the colonies, where they were differentiated from the indigenous subaltern women. The danger that Maria Koundoura suggests in relation to the symbolic use of tropes such as that of the border is apposite in relation to talk of 'deterritorialization'.

In the image of identity that this narrative [of borders and liminality] invokes, the specificity of the 'border' thus becomes a metaphor and, *as* a metaphor, it loses its particular *national* socio-political relevance and turns into a universal *cultural* symbol that hides the acts of nation that construct it[.] (1998, 72)

Kehinde is about migrancy and the negotiation of cultural traditions and contexts. It is also, however, about the struggle for possession of a home in a bricks and mortar

²⁸ Terrborg-Penn demonstrates the degree to which the struggle for enfranchisement among women in North America gave itself respectability, at least to some extent, by rejecting the idea of any extension of the vote to coloured women either locally or in the Caribbean.

sense.²⁹ Settlement might be a valuable word here, its more emotive connotations of home crosshatching with institutional and legal nuances. It is the fact that liberty under capitalism can hardly be disentangled from property rights which makes the negotiations in much of Emecheta's work so fraught. As the family struggles through an itinerary of London residences in her autobiography *Head Above Water* (1986) there is a clear severance from those left behind in the working class environments of 'Pussy Cat Mansions' as well as an alienation from a previous cultural context. Emecheta makes full use of fiction's ability to present ambivalences and contradictions: the freedom of a new home and the alienations it also entails.

I pointed earlier at the extent to which 'migration' in western theory seems to have an irresistible logic implied within it, that is to say, seems always to carry the subtext 'migration-to-the-west.' Gay Wilentz, (1992) for example, has sought to trace a historical tradition that has been peculiarly the reserve of black women and their 'gynocentric mothering process.' (xxix) She argues that because the transmission of cultural norms is perceived to be part of a realm of women's labour, there exists an unmarked female tradition of non-oppositional identity forming work. Wilentz points out the path of this tradition in a variety of texts by black women writers, all marked by what she terms the quality of 'oral literature.' I cite her thesis only as an example of the kind of trajectory that is often implied in theoretical work: out of Africa, into the North.

²⁹ Festus Iyayi's short story 'When they came for Akika Lamidi' is a very different but powerful consideration of home. Like so many of the other pieces in *Awaiting Court Martial* (1996), Iyayi writes about politics refracted through its domestic consequences, and, in this example, its consequences for the domestic realm as such. Dissident cartoonist Lamidi and his wife are woken in the night by banging at their door which they take at first to be armed robbers, and which is revealed later as a government execution squad. The bulk of the story is concerned with exposing the fragility of home in a context where dwelling becomes impossible, in the most immediate and brutal sense. Thinking of Simmel's famous note on the 'Bridge and Door' (1997a [1909], 170-174), we might read Iyayi's story as an attempt to catch the feeling of powerlessness when that boundary which constitutes the most directly meaningful arena of human life is exposed from the outside.

Since Africa is the original source of these values, customs and traditions that have crossed and recrossed the Atlantic, *my direction is from Africa into the diaspora, in this case the United States.* (xvii, my italics)

Obviously there are more than appropriate reasons why this is such a recognised template and the African diaspora is a major historical fact. There are also, however, valid reasons for seeking to trace alternative trajectories and passages. The quote from Wilentz both recognises and then immediately disavows the influence of migrations in other directions. As a brief contribution, then, towards the recognition of some other journeys, ones which are discrepant in terms of this model, I want to conclude the section by looking at the work of a migrant woman writer whose movement has been from one arena of the developing world to another. Kanchana Ugbabe is Indian born, educated in part in Australia but a long term resident of Nigeria. As such her short stories present a perspective not given enough attention in critical work, although the fictional writing of a similar figure, the Jamaican born Nigerian academic Karen King-Aribisala, is perhaps familiar to a limited extent in Britain.

It is [my] cross-cultural perspective that gives me the impetus to write short stories. I feel I have a unique angle of vision: Indian from the outside and Nigerian from the inside. (1994, 329)

Ugbabe's own expression of the imperative she feels towards writing, both here and in interview,³⁰ makes recourse to the variety of her cultural experience. She is specific in detailing what she feels her position to be, differentiating it from that of the expatriate, for whom there remains, she says: 'a ghetto of cultural support' (personal communication) and for whom there is no sense of having been required to jettison prior cultural baggage. At the same time she consciously parallels this 'insider/outsider' status to that which women occupy. This is not just a loose usage of the metaphor of periphery, but a deliberate recognition of the status of women in

Nigeria where marriage, becoming an 'in law', represents an inclusion limited by the absence of consanguinity:

Women as daughter-in-laws even within one culture are "inside" and "outside" at the same time because blood ties are strong in Africa, and the daughter-in-law comes from the outside. (1993, unpublished)

Both for this reason of social position then, and in as much as women are still associated with the domestic environment and that environment with the cultural 'home', she argues that they are better able to present the dilemmas of a cross-cultural existence than their male counterparts.

Her short stories, as she has herself suggested, often revolve around the significance of small objects, the meaningful investments that they carry from personal biography. In *The Silver Toe-Rings* (1991) for example, Radhika returns from a visit to relatives in India to her Nigerian husband and children bearing the new piece of eponymous jewellery. The narrative carefully draws back the historical connotations of Radhika's possessions, the links with her mother, with her childhood. The return however, is unsettled by her husband's distance and his newly initiated affair. Walking around the house, trying to placate him with food and interest, the bells slowly drop off her toe-rings until Radhika realises suddenly: 'One look at him and she knew they were worlds apart.' (305) But which worlds? Ugbabe's stories capture beautifully the pain of unshared cultural associations, the discrepancies in codes of significance. Yet this does not really seem to be the space which interrupts the relationship:

Would Lawal notice her second toe and admire her silver ornaments? They probably wouldn't make any impression on him. [...] 'Why don't you sell your gold and give me the money to do business with?' - he had said to her many a time [...] They were hard cash as far as he was concerned, and worthless in his wife's cupboard. (302)

³⁰ Details here come from my correspondence with Kanchana Ugbabe over the course of three years, a face to face interview conducted in Jos, summer 1999 and communication by e-mail at various points.

He, for his part, looks at her with continual suspicion: 'wary of her attention as if it were a business deal he was being drawn into' (304).

In interview Ugbabe talks about being sufficiently 'inside' a cultural order to understand its codes and practices, but not close enough to actually have 'faith' in them. Something like the distinction Clifford Geertz makes between understanding why a joke is funny and actually laughing at it (1983, chapter 3). This is, perhaps, the kind of deterritorialization that Kaplan is talking about, and indeed which so much recent writing has focused on as the inheritance of migrancy. It is clearly important and the sense of this disjunction is unquestionably there in *The Silver-Toe Rings*. This may in part account for the fact that this story was the first of Ugbabe's initially private writings to be taken up by a source of public dissemination, in this case the BBC World Service. A multicultural agenda has certainly taken the place of that search for 'authentic voices' which was evident in the early reception of African texts in Britain. Yet the real pain of the story seems to arise not so much from a clash of Igbo and Indian understandings as from the clash between *any* emotional investment in objects on the one hand and the de-sentimentalising vision of capital on the other, what Marx called the 'the icy water of egotistical calculation'.³¹ Approaching *The Silver Toe-Rings* in the context of current theory it is an almost unavoidable assumption that its key concern is the meeting of cultural orders. But in fact, reading the text carefully, the question it poses is as much that of the fragile assertions of human significance and memory in objects, where this assertion has to fight against the abstraction of things to mere exchange value.

There is an almost paradigmatic triangular relationship in Ugbabe's writing between a husband, a wife and another women. In the piece just mentioned, and also

³¹ For a wonderful examination of Marx's sense of the significance of material objects and how the reductive nature of exchange value was demonstrated in his personal life, see Stallybrass, 1998.

in *The White Rooster* (1992) the third co-ordinate is a mistress. In *Blessing in Disguise* (unpublished) it is a second wife; in *Golden Opportunities* (1994) and *Survivor* (1996) a woman who comes from the outside and befriends the wife. Overtly these stories deal with the kind of accommodations that migrancy requires, a reconciliation to different cultural orders. In this respect the relation between husband and wife represents the field of negotiation. But read as a whole her work looks a little different, an oblique comment on the kind of relationships that exist *between women* in the context of patriarchy. Often what this means is a non-relationship. *The White Rooster* presents this with typical understatement. In one scene the reader watches the wife, as she in turn imagines the husband watching his new mistress:

Week after week she was into the little intimate details of where he kept his toothbrush, the side of the bed he slept on, the way he hung his shirt by the collar in the corner of the wardrobe-door. He watched her leave her fingerprints on everything. (64)

Of course, Ugbabe is writing here about the sense of the exclusion of the central character, the fact that: 'The Indian movies of my childhood and youth hadn't prepared me for this.' (65) Refusing to 'unlearn' herself the narrator increasingly loses contact with her husband. At another level, however, the story is about the space between the narrator and Agnes, the other woman.

It was a little tableau in which he and she were the central characters and I, the unseen but all-knowing chorus. (66)

There is pathos here not just because the narrator is pushed off-stage, but also because she is recognising that the stage moves with her husband. All through the story, and also in *Blessing in Disguise*, the relation between the two women characters exists only through their mutual relationship with the husband. The poignant absence, I suggest, what the stories are speaking of without ever actually speaking of it (the silence in Macherey's sense) lies with the estrangement of women from each other

under conditions of male economic dominance. In *Golden Opportunities*, a story which does bring two female figures into direct contact, the circumstantial warping of their relationship is clear. Kemi arrives from Lagos, bringing with her a confidence that both disturbs and attracts the narrator. She carries a promise of 'peculiar independence' (335) which means, necessarily, an economic freedom. Ugbabe has already powerfully figured the relation between a material liberty and the escape from a gendered dependence.

Lying in bed, I looked around the room. There were landmarks everywhere, milestones, souvenirs of my quarrels with my husband over other women, real and imagined, and my attempts to get even with him. The Sony Cassette player marked a major quarrel, when I rushed out and bought it as something belonging to me. [...] Another heated argument resulted in expensive lace curtains. The shrouded figures emerged one by one from the closet, women who inhabited my bedroom in silhouetted shapes, lurking in corners, insinuating themselves between the sheets. (334)

This is an extraordinarily powerful statement of the way in which a relationship between women has been distorted so that it emerges only as a ghostliness in articles salvaged from male capital. The hauntings around the edges of these commodities are, as with all commodities, the traces of a distorted human relationship. The relationship between women displaced, emerging only as a presence within presents, possession within possessions. The story doubles its point by leaving the narrator at the conclusion bereft, Kemi having taken the narrator's money but never having sent the promised material for trading.

Conclusion.

To conclude then, I want to foreground in my reading of Ugbabe's stories, not so much the question of how cultural identities are negotiated as the fact that her migrant

position allows her to make witness to homologous experiences of exclusion that face women, as well, it should be said, as a continuity of traditions of female struggle and independence which have been historically strong in Africa.³² As a final example I take the short story *Exile* (unpublished) which captures this with great economy. The piece builds itself out of a kind of topography of a social space: the compound of the mother of the narrator's husband. The narrator remembers and imagines various scenes on this socially significant ground, the place of home: a funeral, the reception of the letter that announced the coming of an oyibo wife, a wedding. Always the narrator is aware of being inside and outside at once. She sleeps with others in the courtyard but recognises her exclusion from subtle codes of dress and behaviour.

It is out of this exclusion that the incident of the story emerges. The narrator has told us that she knows: 'In my husband's culture, people habitually put their arms around each other[.]' (1) So, arriving home from a trip to Europe she finds herself inadvertently leading the group into Mamma's courtyard, this location of controlled familial hierarchy.

Without giving it a thought, I went up with my arms outstretched to embrace her. She continued the dance movements, elbows bent, feet moving to an internal rhythm, but it was as if she didn't see me. As if I didn't exist. Her eyes fixed in ecstasy, their gaze went past me to her son and grandchildren coming after me. I had barely touched her when with one strong elbow, following the rhythms of the dance, she forcefully shoved me aside. (6)

This ending of the story rings immediately with echoes of its opening, in which the narrator looks back further still, remembering a similar sense of social display from her own childhood in a different, unspecified culture:

³² See, for example, Johnson-Odim's powerful essay on feminist consciousness in colonial west Africa (1998, 77-93). Asked about the leitmotif of 'survival' in her stories, a word that continually resurfaces, it was to this idea of incipient feminism that Ugbabe turned, the history of African women finding spaces of freedom and movement within an order that placed gender specific obligations on both men and women.

Palms joined together I greeted, hesitant from a safe distance. As a child it was an awkward routine. [...] I joined my palms together tentatively, then went about twisting the curtains that divided the passageway from the living room, or stood on one leg, scratching my left ankle with my right toe [...] As a grown woman it was still not easy [...] It was drawing attention to oneself.

Quite deliberately Ugbabe brackets the narrative with two different, but equally interstitial spaces: curtains between the passageway and the living-room of her childhood, and the entrance to the family courtyard of her marriage. Given such a focus on the liminal it is almost intuitive in the present critical climate to assume that she is using the position of a migrant protagonist to produce a sense of the relativity of cultural orders. This theme certainly does occur in Ugbabe's writing, but the careful repetition here of a social topography of exclusion seems to me to mark out, much more obviously, a cross-cultural continuity of experience. This is not set in the abstract (one of Ugbabe's key concerns has been to ask 'How do I present this reality without encasing it in glass?' (1993, 6)) but rather, in the detailed recognition of specific social practices in different contexts. As the author has said herself, at the heart of the story is a repeated account of 'certain expectations, norms of behaviour' that she finds recurrently imposed on the female subject: a common female inscription in forms of gendered, self-deprecating bodily practice and the resultant 'interplay of feelings of acceptance and rejection.' (4) It becomes clearer then, why Ugbabe has written sceptically about the fact that 'multiculturalism can be romanticized as offering an enriched and multifaceted approach to life, free of the prejudices of nationalism and regionalism[.]' (5) Here, the *Exile*, rather than discovering a liberating recognition of the relativist construction of cultural orders, finds in the repeated, inscribed marginalisation of women, a repetition of that very 'inside/outside' position which is supposedly a key benefit of migrancy. As was suggested at the end of the last chapter, and as is developed more fully in chapter six,

the fictional presentation of homologous experience, particularly in this case homologous experiences of exclusion, are among the crucial offerings of migrant writing.

Chapter 5: Migrant Narratives and Symbolic Capital.

In their introductory chapter to *Migrants of Identity* (1998), a recent collection of essays on 'Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement', the joint editors of the volume make reference to the putative discipline of 'iterology.' This term, borrowed from Michel Butor, is used by Dawson and Rapport to denote the conjunction between narrative and geographical movement, between the mobility of human life and the continual need to make a coherent story of personal history:

the study of social life and the study of story-telling might be seen to be bound together by a commensurate interest in the relationship between movement and identity. (19)

The writers are careful to distance themselves from any suggestion that this implies a static subject from whose still centre such stories are formed. Rather, and aptly enough in the context of reflexivity and the critique of anthropology, they make the familiar suggestion that it is in movement itself that our homes are constituted: 'It is in the motion of narrative that people are at home.' (1998, 34)

It is implied in their suggestion of a new science of iterology that the examination of this mobile aura of who-we-are would be peculiarly relevant to the modern world:

Exile, emigration, banishment, labour migrancy, tourism, urbanization and counter-urbanization are the central motifs of modern culture, while being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present, are perhaps the most fitting metaphors for the journeying, modern consciousness[.] (23)

To be clear, Rapport and Dawson specifically refute the idea that modernity is a place of *essential* ontological rootlessness and foreground instead the resilience of the category of 'home.' Or rather, and this is where there is something of a paradox, they foreground the *project*, the *process* of continually narrating a home to ourselves. It is

because narrative has the property of rhizome, of multiple centres in the manner of a root-system, and because stories are therefore polyvalent, that they can be reworked and made meaningful in new situations. In a newly mobile world, they suggest, the act of storytelling - individually or as a group - looms large. In the absence of clearly centring co-ordinates, that which was (presumably) always the case is thrown into startling clarity: we are only the ever changing, reworked stories which we tell of ourselves.¹

The fetishisation of the imaginary.

This chapter, then, shifts the focus of this work from the migrant artist or intellectual towards the more general expatriate. At the same time, as is patently obvious, recent theorising of migrancy keeps us close to the same conjunction of themes as was discussed in the first three chapters. In what follows I take up the question of personal stories of movement, examining them in relation to the theoretical position delineated above. Obviously human beings do make stories of their lives. As large numbers of people are faced with the crossing of cultural boundaries, and sometimes national borders, these narratives have to resolve new questions. Nevertheless, there are it seems to me, at least two difficulties with the question of an iterological science, the study of this narration-in-movement / narration-as-movement. Firstly there is the

¹ This implication of a valency between the experience of migration and the act of narrative is familiar from theorists referred to in previous chapters. It is something of a motif in various branches of recent literary criticism, from Marangoly George's 'all fiction is homesickness' (1996, 1-9) to Michael Seidel's: 'The place in time has become exilic ground, inhabitable only through the approximations of narrative remembrance. It is precisely the metaphoric lines that exile plots along both a temporal and spatial axis that make it so dominant a condition in narrative and so prominent an emblem for the narrative imagination.' (1986, 198) See also Ifekwunigwe (2000) on the 'telling' of diasporan experience and Hawley's introductory essay to *Cross-Addressing: Resistance Literature and Cultural Borders* (1996), in which he states the motif of the collection: '[W]e assert that the telling of the stories

apparent threat of a form of voluntarism. This is exacerbated by the holiday brochure connotations of liberty and freedom that, all empirical evidence and advisory admonitions to the contrary notwithstanding, continue to circle around the term travel. If we are only who we narrate ourselves to be, then presumably the material inequalities of the world can be resolved by teaching the poor how to better recount their biographies. No one, of course, would ascribe to this parody of a position although we have seen Okri make a startlingly similar suggestion. But the rejection of an account of structure on the one hand, and of centred subjectivities on the other, can threaten to slip into a postmodern, consumerist ‘make of yourself what you want’ philosophy. In rebutting a Levi-Straussian image of narrative as that which speaks ‘through’ human agents - i.e. a determining social grammar - Dawson and Rapport suggest that men and women ‘are at home in personal narratives that move away from any notion of fixity within a common idiom, and their identities derive from telling moving stories of themselves and their world-views.’ (30) What seems absent, even in their carefully inflected position is a sense that narratives are also reliant on access to cultural and symbolic resources that are not equitably distributed, and often on institutional settings that control the distribution of these resources and delimit who can plausibly say what, and in what ways, even about themselves. The realm of the imaginary is no more a free, unstructured space than any of the ‘material’ arenas to which it is conventionally opposed.² Acknowledging this does not need to imply the reduction of human agency to the mere mouthpiece of a social logic.

The second difficulty is the occasional but apparently unproblematic reversal in the terms of the argument. So, for example, Marangoly George’s aphorism, ‘all

of these struggles [i.e. of border crossings] in many cases serves as a site for their most intense realisation and, sometimes, for their transformation as well.’ (5)

fiction is homesickness' has been inverted by the end of her book to read: 'all homesickness is fiction.'³ Similar and more familiar is the ambivalence in Said's concept of Orientalism. The term initially denotes the discursive misrepresentation of a culture so that it comes to act as self-affirming 'other' to a European self-image. But it is never entirely clear what relationship exists between this system of knowledge ('less a place than a topos' (Said, 1991, 177)) and the physical space which is designated 'the Orient.' It does seem that there is a tautology lurking here. The fact that identity is increasingly an act of narration is read as proof of the more mobile, decentred nature of our world which in turn produces decentred subjectivities whose traces are discernible only in the narrations they make of their lives. Here migration is both cause and effect together: that which de-couples place and identity but also the result of that de-coupling.

Arun Kundnani has valuably recognised the increasing importance of symbolism to the commodity market (1998, 49-71).⁴ In his strong version of the globalisation thesis, this presents a major change in the basic formations of the capitalist system and in particular, an increasing attenuation of the relationship between capital and labour. Whether or not we subscribe to this assessment it is important to recognise that the so called cultural turn in the social sciences cannot be viewed outside of a corresponding turn in the nature of commodities and goods in which the symbolic (e.g. the brand), the imaginary (e.g. advertising) and other cultural

² 'Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games - the economic game, but also the cultural games (the religious field, the juridical field, the philosophical field, etc.) are not 'fair games''. (Bourdieu, 2000, 214-5)

³ I should say here, in fairness to Rosemary Marangoly George that she uses this inversion, at least in part, as a *description* of the position presented in a number of novels from what she terms the 'immigrant genre.' 'The sentiment accompanying the absence of home - homesickness - can cut two ways: it could be a yearning for the authentic home (situated in the past or in the future) or it could be the recognition of the inauthenticity or the created aura of all homes.' (1996, 175)

⁴ For a related argument about the increasing importance of the cultural realm within the global system, see Wallerstein (1990, 31-55) and Amin (1998, 49-65) on the rising culturalist ideology.

productions are increasingly necessary to the operations of the market. As Jameson has famously said:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become inaugurated into commodity production generally. (1984, 56)

If our analyses are not to contribute to a situation where ‘the information age is really an age of disinformation’ (Kundnani, 1998, 70) we need to pose questions against a theory in which cultural phenomena are seen to originate in a particular modern condition which is then reduced to the parameters of those cultural phenomena themselves. The movement of people across boundaries may force a recognition of the importance of narratives of identity, but to extrapolate from this that all identities have no co-ordinates beyond those of the individual ‘iterological’ project is fundamentally a fetishistic act.

As the importance of the ‘knowledge-industries’ increases (Said, 1994, 3-17), and as imaginative aspects of production take an increasing role in the western market so that companies such as Nike and Bennetton can be reduced primarily to overseers and promoters of marketable symbols,⁵ the ‘cultural arena’ is tied into the fetishism of the commodity circuit in new and important ways. Marx deliberately tries to teach the ‘reader’ of the commodity not to understand value as a quality revealed only in exchange with other commodities, but to reach beyond this ‘accidental and purely relative’ (Marx, 1995 [1887], 14) expression to the structural relationships embodied in the commodity. In other words, not to read the value of the commodity in the purely contingent expression of exchange, but past this to the ‘crystals of [...] social substance [human labour power]’ (15) whose fact is what makes commodities

⁵ That is to say, the production of goods is apparently distanced from these companies through outsourcing and indeed the sale of the final product is often carried out under licence by franchise holders. In this context a key role of companies such as these is to ensure the continued profile of the brand by sponsorship and advertising, and its ‘purity’ by litigation serving to ring-fence its core symbols and logos.

equivalent and exchangeable. The crucial point for this thesis is that as the symbolic becomes increasingly incorporated into the commodity market, theorising narrative in such a way that the world is indistinguishable from its telling is to accede to a fetishisation of the imaginary.⁶ Our identities are mere narrations only if we accept at face-value the fetishised model of narrative, a more simple version of which is the advertiser's lure that certain logos and fashion-house names actually 'say' something about those who consume them. Of course, acts of consumption do mark out levels of distinction, but in asking the reader to question the claim of the commodity to be read at face-value, Marx's critique of reification is asking us also to think of whom we have identity *with*. That is to say, to make his readers aware, beyond the superficial agency of consumption, that certain groups share equivalent structural locations and this aspect of the question remains vital in the face of the shift towards cultural goods in the Western market and the fetishism of symbolic and literary production attendant on this turn. As Graham Harrison has cogently argued in developing a 'political economy of hybridisation' in urban Africa:

[T]he value of identity as a flexible and affective unit of analysis is rendered hollow if one unties identity from broader social forces and relations. (1998, 248)

These, then, are some provisos. People do tell stories of themselves and migrants no less than anyone else. What this chapter will look at is the way in which a number of Nigerian expatriates narrate their experiences of Britain, and the kind of narrative structures which they employ in order to tell the trajectory of their lives. As previous chapters argued, we cannot very easily disentangle geographical movement from class movement, cannot easily separate these two connotations of estrangement. In particular, I argue that we need to consider not just the points of view that

⁶ I think Jameson means something similar in his discussion of the simulacra when he writes: 'Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes into *life* in a society where exchange-

migrancy makes available, but also the legitimacy it might confer, the social 'position' of view. What this distinction finally expresses, as with all cultural distinctions, is an economic fact.⁷

I begin, however, with some official statistics and do so precisely because these records are the very antithesis of narrative, information as opposed to storytelling in the sense of Benjamin's opposition. Out of this pre-digested matter, this material that so completely and misleadingly fulfils that requirement of being 'understandable in itself' (Benjamin, 1968, 89) we need to recover stories of human beings. This is about more than just recalling that statistical figures represent physical figures, human bodies. It is about an attempt to recover the act of story from its production as a commodity. Given the newspaper-selling headlines that portray asylum seekers swamping Britain we might recall why Benjamin chose the print media as his example in discussing the end of storytelling. Against this, and against the blandly manipulable statistics that feed this process as its raw material we need to recover that 'something [which] seemed inalienable [...] the ability to exchange experiences.' (83)

The second, related reason for beginning with official figures is that they remind of us of the degree to which international movement is mediated and controlled by state authorities and of how very semi-permeable national boundaries are. The table below gives the figures for applications for asylum in the UK made by Nigerian citizens for selected years and the decisions made on applicants from Nigeria in the same year.

value has been generalised to the point at which the memory of use-value is effaced[.]' (1984, 66)

⁷ '[E]conomic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their specific effects only

Table 1⁸	1991	1995	1996	1997	1998
Applications for Asylum from Africa	27500	--	11300	9500	12400
Applications for Asylum from Nigeria	335	5825	2900	1480	1380
Refugee Status Granted	>3	>3	15	65	100
Special Leave to Remain	0	5	10	30	65
Refusals	25	2625	5120	4315	1840

On the other hand, table 2 gives an analysis of the occupation of all incoming migrants to the UK for selected years as estimated (in thousands) from the International Passenger Survey.

Table 2⁹	Profess. or Manager.	Manual or Clerical	Students	House-wives	Other Adults	Children	All Persons
1995	86.4 (35%)	46.4 (19%)	59.2 (24%)	16.3 (7%)	5.9 (2%)	31.3 (13%)	245.5
1996	89.3 (33%)	57.4 (21%)	62.5 (23%)	20.6 (8%)	9.4 (3%)	32.9 (12%)	272.2
1997	93.2 (33%)	44.0 (15%)	78.8 (28%)	17.6 (6%)	8.7 (3%)	42.2 (15%)	284.6

Taken together this gives some indication of the degree to which international travel is predominantly sanctioned and available to a male professional class and to those moving for reasons of education. Analyses of the 1991 census figures bear out this differential access to travel in relation to the Nigerian born population of the UK, 14% of which fell into social category I (as opposed to 5% in the resident white population) and 34% of whom held higher degrees, as opposed to 12% in the English-

to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root[.]' (Bourdieu, 1997 [1983], 54)

⁸ Obviously given the delay in considering cases it is unlikely that there is a direct correspondence between specific applications and decisions in any particular year. (Source: Home Office Asylum Statistics 1998 and Ethnicity in the 1991 Census, Vol. II). The decision figures for 1998 are marked as provisional in the Home Office publication. All figures are rounded to the nearest five and exclude dependants. It appears that recently Ireland has become the first site of Nigerian asylum seekers in Europe. According to a UNHCR report, 881 applications for asylum were received in Ireland from Nigerians in the first quarter of 2000. The figure for the same period in Britain was 255 (collated Home Office Monthly Asylum Statistics). Among the responses to this influx was the extraordinary idea of 'floating hostels' and, more predictably, arson attacks on asylum residences in Tipperary. For further details see the UNHCR news network on-line: www.unhcr.ch/refworld/cgi-bin/newscountry.pl?country=Nigeria

⁹ The IPS is conducted by the Office of National Statistics, using a voluntary sample of between 0.1% and 5% of passengers depending on the particular route and time. For further details see *International Migration 1997*.

born population.¹⁰ Furthermore, the gendered divisions that affect migration are suggested by the fact that of the 17.6 thousand migrants who arrived in Britain classifying themselves as housewives, just over 76% travelled to accompany or to join someone already in the country. Among *all* incoming migrants for that year, this reason for travel accounted for just under 25% of respondents. Male migration from commonwealth African countries other than the Republic of South Africa accounted in 1997 for more than twice the number of women migrating from these nations (*IM97*). These figures, of course, do not include certain categories - stowaways, smuggled immigrants for example - which by definition elude the IPS. There are, by comparison, other categories, notably the armed forces and members of the diplomatic services whose migrations are considered so routine, so legitimate, as to be deliberately bracketed outside the provenance of the survey. These figures clearly offer some substantiation to the popular Nigerian idea of an on-going 'brain-drain' featuring highly educated African professionals moving to the developed nations. It hardly needs pointing out that Britain's gain in this respect is Nigeria's loss.

The interviews on which this chapter is based were carried out among twenty-two Nigerian born residents in Glasgow and its surrounding area during the period of this research: 1998-2000. It is supplemented by a questionnaire survey among other Nigerian born respondents also resident in Glasgow and by discussions and questionnaire work carried out in Nigeria in the summer of 1999. A sizeable proportion (12 of 22) of the interviewees in the UK were students or ex-students who had gained an academic post in one of the city's universities or colleges. A smaller number were naturalised British citizens from an older generation of immigrants who

¹⁰ Source: Ethnicity in the 1991 census, Vol. II. (56-57). The figures for subjects whose highest qualification was a first degree repeat the pattern (Nigerian born group 31%; English born group 21%) as do those for subjects whose highest qualification was an A-level (31% and 12% respectively). For an early account see Goody and Groothues, 1977, 151-181.

were either retired, ran small businesses or were employed in non-managerial white collar work. A few were children of Nigerian parents who had spent the majority of their life in Scotland.¹¹ In Nigeria, a sizeable minority of the questionnaire respondents were University students and a smaller number were professional.

For what it is worth, the Nigerian born population of Britain was estimated at 47,085 after the 1991 census (*EINC, Vol II*), double the figure for 1971. These are potentially very misleading figures, but given the boom in asylum applications during Abacha's regime, and given the youthful nature of the previously resident population, it can be assumed that the population would have increased substantially by 2001. The number of previously Nigerian citizens granted UK citizenship increased from 2430 in 1996 to 3550 in 1998 and the total percentage of the population defining themselves as Black-African increased from 0.4% of the total population in 1993 to 0.6% in 1997.¹²

Counteracting this, of course, are potential changes in self-definition among long-term residents and children of mixed marriages. Certainly a number of my respondents among the older group referred to above were clear about their status as 'British', defined in quite deliberate contradistinction to 'Nigerian.'¹³ Interviewees in Glasgow lived primarily in rented accommodation in and around the city centre and

¹¹ As stated in the introduction, interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes and were structured around a set series of questions, although digression from this framework was welcomed. Interviews were taped and scripts typed up in detail except on a couple of occasions where interviewees felt unwilling to have the conversation recorded. In these cases details come from written notes. On occasion the names of particular institutions, places or people may have been omitted in line with promises of confidentiality.

¹² Sources: Persons Granted British Citizenship (1996-1998 figures), Home Office and *Population Trends 96*, where the information is derived from the Labour Force Survey with all the implications that holds.

¹³ This led to a number of complicated negotiations. For example, in response to the question: where do you think of as home, one respondent replied: UK. But in response to the further question 'why do think of that place as home' he replied: 'UK. I have live here most of my adult life and so have acquired western kind of life style. Not to forgate I still think I am a Nigerian by culture and birth.' (Male, 51-65, Nurse, M: 'street hawker', F: farmer).

West end, or in privately owned housing in the suburbs or the surrounding new towns.¹⁴

The inevitability of the uninevitable.

We do well to remind ourselves that the African presence on these islands is long-standing, reaching back to the times of Roman Britain at least. By the sixteenth century an impoverished population arriving on slavers and trade ships, as well as a more elite group brought for education in order to serve commercial interests on the African west coast, were familiar in the major ports (Killingray, 1994, 2-27). Nevertheless, discussion of the forerunning African migrants to Britain tends to revolve around the names of those whose familiarity is a result of their writings: Cugoana, Ignatius Sancho and later figures like James Africanus Horton. I want to begin with a comment by Paul Edwards on perhaps the most famous of this group, Olaudah Equiano (1750?-1797), whom Edwards himself did a great deal to make familiar. In an essay primarily dealing with a different matter, Edwards points out Equiano's sense of providence, his feeling of being 'a particular favorite of Heaven' (Edwards, 1994, 36). This sense of assurance in the incredible context of Equiano's life found expression in his turn from the Church of England to Calvinist congregationalism. Nevertheless, Edwards concludes, its root-origin must be seen to lie with the stubborn cultural resilience of the Igbo concept of chi, whose ambiguous

¹⁴ This accords fairly well with the 1991 census figures which suggest that the majority of respondents whose origin countries are described as 'New Commonwealth or Other African' were resident in the postcode areas G3, G12 and G21 which represent, broadly, the city's middle class West End, and part of the South Side which is home to a substantial Asian immigrant community.

oscillation between pre-destination and voluntarism Achebe was to later employ, with great effect, in *Things Fall Apart*.¹⁵

The sense of a special destiny in his life, leading him on to fortune, is closely related I believe to Equiano's early years in Igbo. (Edwards, 1994, 36)

Over two hundred years after Equiano, another Igbo migrant to Britain looks back and traces the extraordinary route by which he comes to be living in Glasgow in order to study microbiological techniques of waste-treatment and disposal. He starts off with a statement that belies the narrative that follows, but is also importantly revealing:

R: *I don't really have a complicated, er, history myself*, I was, I was born in the middle of the civil, well just about as the civil war in Nigeria was about to start. The civil war started 67, I was born 66. Actually I was born as Nigeria was already in its political trouble because the first coup that started it all had just ended [...] So, then, er, the last of eight children born to, er, a peasant farmer and a trader mother and, em, I think my position in the family made it, made me slightly lucky in the sense that my first brother, who'd done up to primary eight education was interested in training the younger ones, and so I started school, quite early at just about six in 1972, and er, went to catholic primary school, went to a catholic college and er, 1982 I got into University, you know.

A: Which University?

R: The University of Nigeria. To study microbiology and graduated in 1986.

A: Right.

R: So, broadly speaking this is my life history.¹⁶

(Male, 21-35, Doctoral student (microbiology), M: trader, F: farmer).

It will be seen shortly just how complicated this biography actually is. Yet, in the telling, it takes on the appearance of a thing achieved, a movement as natural as gravity. Nothing could be more straightforward, more certain than this trajectory of a life traced with hindsight. It is not modesty or self-depreciation on the part of the respondent to describe this as a 'simple' history but rather, like Equiano's sense of election, it speaks about the sense of inevitability that inflects, retrospectively, a path

¹⁵ As readers of that novel will remember, *chi* implies a personal spirit with charge of the subject's destiny, but also the possible sense that the subject themselves, if possessed of enough 'self-determination' can effect a change in that destiny. See Achebe's own explanation in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975, 93-101).

¹⁶ All transcript sections as presented as completely as possible. Where the recording or an interruption makes a statement unclear this is indicated with '(?)' inserted after the word in question. R. stands uniformly for respondent, A. for myself. Ellipses are marked [...] and a series of unbracketed dots signifies a pause in the conversation itself. Brief information on interviewees is given in the form: (gender, age range, occupation, M: mother's occupation, F: father's occupation).

that is in fact anything but inevitable. As the interview progresses, the interventions of sheer contingency as well as the multiple impact of other individuals becomes apparent:

R: I lost my father when I was 2, and then basically the job of bringing me up fell to my big brothers and my mother who had to double as mother and father.

A: Which could not have been easy.

R: Er, it wasn't easy but because my brothers er, were grown then, like my first brother was active in the Nigerian civil war, so, basically he had to play the role of father of some sort, you know, well then life is hardly easy for a peasant, easy for a peasant farmer in Nigeria. So, yeah, but the proximity to the University, like the University of Nigeria, actually about 20% of the land mass occupied by that University was my parental land. [...] So at a time when most secondary schools are boarding schools I went to school from home and to University from home. [...] I mean, of course the federal Universities are tuition free in Nigeria but if you have to live in school then it becomes an entirely different (?) business.

The interviewee's access to a university education, in other words, was reliant on the random, but nevertheless very material fact that his parent's farmland was among that on which the University at Nsukka was built. This accident of placement allowed him to attend a tertiary level institution without the attendant expenses of accommodation. Later he goes on to expand the importance of the role of his elder brother and mother:

R: I think I'm lucky in a way, right, lucky enough to have gone to kindergarten or what you may consider nursery school, which is something slightly rare. It's just that in 1972, that's 2 years after the civil war, my first brother came back from a, from active service in 1970 and he probably came in with ideas, what he wanted to do with his younger ones (?) Ok, so, just about that period he got employed by the University as a technician and er, it was possible for him, for instance, to see maybe a need for the small ones to go to something like nursery school, you know? An unusual (?) in those days which made it possible for me to start school at six instead of seven, you know, so, eh, he was, he was very particular about everybody going to school, it was a strong, a lot of financial burden for him because at that time primary education was not free, ok, he was, he was very particular about school and he was prepared to fund it, so you could say a lot of luck too. You know, because quite a number of other people may not have been lucky to have a brother like that, so, and er, at that time my Mum was, was very active, you know, as a trader, so she could contribute substantially to family economics. You know, so, basically life in Nigeria at least at that time is a matter of eat and stay alive.

What this trajectory confers, finally, is a status that is extra-ordinary:

R: I'm the only one of the eight of us [siblings] to have travelled outside Nigeria.

However, when the interviewee comes to talk about why he is in Britain the conjunction of events that he has described, sacrifice and chance, are replaced by a description of his own volition:

R: It's, it's funny you know, because as a child I have always thought of... unfortunately I'm not in London, but as a child I had this, this, eh, desire to study in London, somehow. You know, but it's, it's close to London as a Nigerian can come anyway.

A: Why, why did you have this...

R: I don't know, I don't know, in fact, er, even now my, my family uses it to pull my legs occasionally.

This return is to something between a desire and a predetermination, to an *ab initio* intention that finds itself vindicated, fulfilled. An awareness of the various contingencies by which this trajectory has been plotted does not prevent the implication that it was something of the subject's own unusual ambition that marked him out. The economically crucial chances that resulted in his migrancy are read retrospectively as the clinching evidence of an exceptionality that was immanent from the start. He is always the one that the family tease about having determined to study in London. This sits correspondent with the fact that *he is* the one, from eight, who has made it to Britain, if not yet to that final terminus. I make the parallel with Equiano's certainty of election not to suggest some transhistorical experience of Igbo expatriates, but only to draw attention to the way in which destinations (both social and geographic), are often narrated as *pre-destinations*, and how often such narrations elide the material facts which make their telling possible.¹⁷ In this respect, my discussion of the narratives of migrancy offered by expatriates in this chapter clearly overlaps with the discussion in chapter three of the elision of material factors in the *theoretical* discussion of migrancy.

Bourdieu talks very relevantly about this narrative strategy in relation to the biographies of famous cultural producers:

Both the retrospective illusion, which establishes final events as the ends of initial experience or behaviour, and the ideology of predestination, which credits exceptional individuals with divine foresight, tacitly assume that life is organised like a story, that it moves

¹⁷ I am not, in this case, taking a position on Edward's thesis regarding the deep but ambiguous determinism of the *chi* concept and its survival in exile. It seems an interesting suggestion but my own reading moves in a different direction.

from an origin, understood as a point of departure and also as a first cause, or better yet, as a generative principle, and that the term of a life is also its goal. (1993, 193)

Other interviewees expressed something similar in different and sometimes less secular language. One woman, now the owner of a small ‘ethnic’ shop and a British citizen, had been left isolated when, shortly after arrival from Nigeria, her husband died. She had, at the time, four small children and was pregnant with a fifth. She described her work as a hospital auxiliary, as a cleaner, and the job of patching her children’s boot-soles with cardboard. But when looking back on this past in a kind of mood of summary, she immediately referred to a recurring dream in which she was forced to cross the river Jordan and battle a fierce lion in the heart of Jerusalem. This motif, it became clear, represented her sense of struggle and unique experience. ‘Every human being,’ she said, ‘we are on a journey.’ In the context of a Christian belief strongly influenced by a Judaistic sense of destiny, this dream was symbolic of her journey and her own survival. In as much as it implies an act of being ‘chosen’, it marked out her sense of divine assurance, something she further described as a private pact with God.

How does it come about, this inevitability of the uninevitable, this retrospective certainty? Because, although the story of this latter interviewee is clearly one of bravery, it is not, as Emecheta’s writing suggests, unique. Nor for that matter, is the first respondent’s youthful assurance of study in London. Any number of the young men I met in bars in Nigeria, or at the University library, or the bike ranks, volunteered an unshakeable *knowledge* that they were bound for America or Europe. At this point I want to return to Bourdieu, whose work, I will suggest, offers us a way of understanding this hindsight effect and ties it back into the elevation of the migrant intellectual as discussed in the opening chapters. One of the most important aspects of

Bourdieu's work, and it is already cited above, is his insistence on recognising the inequalities that structure the games of 'identity'¹⁸ and the degree to which the power to define who one is, that is to say what one's trajectory or purpose might be, is dependent on a prior access to forms of social power and legitimisation. His limit case in this respect are those he calls the 'subproletariat' - the long-term unemployed, the socially redundant - who are denied any access to 'meaningfulness', which is also to be denied relation to any envisagable future.¹⁹ For this group there is the turn to something worse than despair. Their recourse is to millenarian dreams whose more or less complete detachment from any potential realisation demonstrates, *not* the free play of the imagination or of stories of identity, but rather:

the relationship between time and power, by showing that the practical relation to the forth-coming, in which the experience of time is generated, depends on power and the objective chances it opens. (Bourdieu, 2000, 223)

It might be possible to argue that this is the context in which the image of movement to the west exists for many of the poorest in Nigeria, a destination conceived as a destiny with all the certainty and unattainability of the never arriving cargo plane or the never reached Holy Land.²⁰ It seems to me however that the specific historical context requires us to read the situation differently.

It may well be the case, indeed given its media and advertising presentation, it could hardly be otherwise, that the Western world has an allure that is often frankly

¹⁸ Discussing Kafka's K. in *The Trial*, Bourdieu glosses identity as follows: '[K. 's] uncertainty about the future is simply another form of uncertainty about what he is, his social being, his 'identity', as one would say nowadays. Dispossessed of the power to give sense, in both senses, to his life, to state the meaning and direction of his existence, he is condemned to live in a time orientated by others, an alienated time.' (2000, 237)

¹⁹ Although Bourdieu's discussion is very convincing, it does seem to me to be a legitimate charge that he takes too little account of fields of cultural meaning that are distinctly popular or subaltern in their make-up and not, therefore, reliant on institutional or state-sanctioned modes of legitimisation. The pre-eminence he gives to the state and to the role of state institutions is surely correct but there might be questions raised about whether it is not more applicable in some contexts than others.

economic for those outside it. Here are the words of three questionnaire respondents from Jos, asked about the idea that the US or the UK are seen as lands of opportunity:

R: Yes, I think and know that is true because is a developed part of the world full of opportunities e.g. jobs, advance schools.

(Male, 21-35, Messenger, M: baker, F: electrician).

R2: Well, it may be true because in the UK everything is at the common man reaches. The common man can get everything at his disposal.

(Male, 21-35, Cleaner, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R3: It is true, because there in UK you don't have to struggle for job opportunities. If you want education it is their free and in fact everything is at your disposal. So UK could be seen as, a promised land where everything is available.

(Female, 21-35, Housewife/student, M: petty trader, F: farmer/preacher).

These are as much statements about the conditions obtaining in Nigeria and the difficulties facing the respondents, as they are about the West itself. What I note however, is that those I met in Nigeria who talked about one day walking the streets of New York and London were from a younger age group, from the generation *after* that which I interviewed in Glasgow. This is an important point. Although those who were living in Scotland clearly represented the exception rather than the rule, there was a possibility in the 1970's and even into the 1980's for some non-elite individuals with luck or economically supported by determined families to access educational facilities. The collapse, or at least the extreme retardation of the tertiary and higher education systems from the Second Republic onwards means that those young people who contemporarily dream of gaining an overseas education are thinking not in millenarian terms at all, but of a trajectory that they have seen obtained, even if only rarely, by the generation prior to their own. One of this prior generation explains:

R: So I have no civil high school education, I sat, I was at home, I worked, you know, all sorts of jobs, eh, in the nineteen, in nineteen sixty three for example, my salary at that time was about three pounds a month, and so I was, if like, um, a bar steward, you know, in a restaurant. [...] And that (?) was a job for you know, people (?) who had fallen by the wayside. That, who didn't have the opportunity to go to high-school because, you know, my parent's couldn't afford, you know, to send me to high school.

A: [I ask about how he came to be University educated.]

²⁰ In other words, in the frame of such classic studies of millenarian belief as *The Religions of the Oppressed* (Lanternari, 1963); *Road Belong Cargo* (Lawerence, 1964); *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, (Worsley, 1957) and *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Cohn, 1970).

R: The policy which the government, either at the state level or at the federal level had maintained for a very long time had been to choose to award scholarships purely on merit. All right, that's been there a very long time policy of the government, either at the state or at the federal level. But then, somewhere in the early 70's, there was a shift in this policy, to say that people from less, if you like, developed areas, you know, would now be given, you know some attention: like what we have in the states, they say oh, equal opportunities to allow the blacks you know to come up. So, it then happened that I was at the right side of the fence at that time. Although I was born in Nigeria, and I schooled (?) in my primary education as I described earlier on, was in Nigeria, I was still coming from an area that was, was underprivileged, so it then came at such a time that (now I have?) a first degree, it doesn't matter what class of degree, the policy has now changed, the focus now was on attending to those less developed areas. So I happened to be the, the man on the spot. That is why, how, all of us benefited from the change of policy, but if the policy of, the previous policy of saying it purely on merit had continued perhaps we might not have been lucky but it doesn't mean that our degrees, in terms of quality, were not, were... if you get a 2:1 you've made it. But then because of competition, so they would say, well you have a 2:1 even if I had, lets say for the sake of argument I had a 2:2, and then somebody with a 2:1, and they say where, where is the local government area (he's?) coming from, oh, you're coming from... oh no, you're one of the, of the elite, alright? you need to give a... you know, a priority to that person coming from a less developed area. So, that's how we all benefited.

A: Are, are things still running in a similar fashion? In terms of...

P: No, I don't think, because eh, things have really fallen apart. The economy has gone downstream, and scholarships have been frozen, in those days you could win federal scholarship or you could win state scholarship or you could get, er, commonwealth scholarships, all sorts of scholarships.

(Male, 36-50, University lecturer, M: Trader, F: 'Public Works Department').

Bourdieu is careful to discuss those 'margins of freedom' by which the current order of things may be challenged, new futures imagined. Nevertheless, the thrust of the chapter on 'Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence' (2000) which I am drawing on here is towards showing how, broadly, there is correspondence between 'positions and dispositions' (221). This 'causality of the probable' (231) he says, means that in general all social subjects, especially the dominated, 'take for granted the greater part of their existence.'²¹ (231) His example of this is the different expectations for the education of their children held by a manual worker on the one hand, a university lecturer on the other. There may have been a time in post-independence Nigeria, however, running into the oil-boom period, when rural farmers, petty urban traders, drivers and others could cherish genuine hopes for where

²¹ For the powerful, paradoxically, this means taking for granted the ability, within some limits of course, to change the nature of existence, not to be simply the subject of other, externally imposed determinations.

their children might ‘arrive’ in overlapping class and geographic terms. To recognise that this possible ideal existed is not to imply that it was widely obtained, nor to underestimate the number of disappointments, or the struggles it necessitated, something that John Munonye presents very well in his under-discussed novel: *Oil Man of Obange*. (1971)²²

The tragedy of many of the post-Second republic generation, the recession generation, is the disjunction, the complete mismatch, between their dispositions and the objective conditions which surround them. For many in the lower and lower-middle ranks of Nigerian urban society, to have a projection of oneself as a ‘future been-to’, as the future returnee, is not millenarian given the examples of the sixties and seventies. What it comes up hard against, however, is a national situation that renders it remote from those conditions of genuine, if faint, possibility that differentiate an ‘in-game’ sense of the potential forth-coming from the alienated dreams of ‘dead time’ (2000, 222). Bourdieu’s earlier discussion of the ‘cheating of a generation’ (1984, 154 forwards) is not about the post-independence African public but about the children of the French working class in a society where academic capital is being devalued and thus losing its liberatory promise for the most deprived. Nevertheless, it has powerful correspondences and I take his poignant description of the ‘*misfirings of the dialectic of aspirations and probabilities*’ as suitable description:

When this ‘broken trajectory’ occurs [...] the agent’s aspirations, flying on above his real trajectory like a projectile carried by its own inertia,

²² Munonye’s book presents the efforts of one man, Jeri, to provide immediate needs and, crucially, education for his family in the context of the new order. The author makes Jeri the very image of the new small-scale entrepreneur, deprived of an extended family - hence a classic individual - he also rejects farming as a way of life and takes instead to trading in palm-oil. His struggles are figured in the daily bike ride to and from the middle-men with his precarious load of oil canisters. In Munonye’s vision this routine but demanding balancing becomes symbolic of the wider social demands placed on the protagonist and the final insufficiency of the individual in the face of this capitalist dispensation. Osofisan usefully describes him as ‘the first truly modern hero in African literature[.]’ (1986, 176; see also Akwanya (2000, 53-63).

describe an ideal trajectory that is no less real, or is at any rate in no way imaginary in the ordinary sense of the word. (1984, 150)

Wendy Griswold's discussion, in the *specific context* of the trajectories of literary producers, offers a useful parallel here:

One might have expected that, with sufficient cultural capital, the sons and daughters of the old elite might be able to trade their cultural advantages for economic and social ones, just as Bourdieu has suggested. But here comes the particular historical conjunction of oil boom / oil bust with the generations of Nigerian writers. The first generation was able to maintain the ideals of the old elites, although mourning their decline. The second anticipated a revival of fortunes through market opportunities that would enable them to cash in their cultural capital. Yet these hopes were dashed after only a decade or so. And the third generation never had the same degree of confidence that cultural production was to be the key to success[.] (2000, 225)

This may appear to have taken us a long way from our original question over retrospective certainty, but in fact an approach to it is already implied in what has just been said. Bourdieu's conception of time, that is 'human time', differentiates itself importantly from the naturalised idea of ongoing, linear time. It differentiates itself also therefore, from readings of social process in which the relation between past, present and future can only be made comprehensible in terms of the recovery or tracing out of a first intention. This is why he objects to Sartre's discernment of Flaubert's *projet originel* (1993, chapter 7).²³ His point is that human activity, human practice 'is not *in* time but *makes* time (human time, as opposed to biological or astronomical time).' (2000, 206) To say, therefore, that the socially powerless are denied a future means that they are without access to any meaningful sense of the forthcoming. Without a stake in the social game they are outside of human time, of time invested with value by virtue of being related to future returns and future involvement in the cultural and other fields.

²³ On the other hand, Bourdieu also recognises that it is almost impossible to talk about trajectory in any other way than that of biography, that there is a certain necessity of retrospective intentionality: 1996, 258-261.

What applies to the idea of the future, applies also to the idea of retrospection. Because for Bourdieu the past is always with us. As he says of the cultural arena, and his relation to Russian Formalism is suggested here, the complete history of the field is immanent in every position within that field.²⁴ At the level of the individual habitus, of inculcated disposition, the past is never past, but always present. Indeed, in as much as it determines our sense of the imminent formations of the field, and therefore our positionings and investments, this immanent past is part of the future. This gives us the complex but powerful formula:

Habitus is that presence of the past in the present which makes possible the presence in the present of the forth-coming. (2000, 210)

What this suggests, then, is that habitus *always* tends to present the socially successful subject's current position as the result of a *coherent, self-defined trajectory*. In the context of migrancy, because habitus is the means by which a final position (geographically and socially) is reconciled to a history and to a disposition arising from that history, the sense of pre-destination is not only a comprehensible strategy but in fact, expressive of how habitus works *in general*. The fact that those Nigerians who have arrived in Britain represent, as the interviewee already cited had it, the 'one out of eight' who made it, at least to themselves,²⁵ reinforces the sense of this trajectory as something extraordinary.

²⁴ One of the ways in which Bourdieu pushes the analysis of say, Tynjanov's 'On Literary Evolution' (1979), is by insisting that, in the cultural field at least, the history of previous position-takings is not present just as a dead fact with which emergent authors must be conversant, but that at all times the prior history of the field is part of the stake, part of the competition. Present position takings are implicitly attempts to define the past history of the field, in which sense that history is not past at all, but always live and effective.

²⁵ This is an important qualification. I don't want to give the impression here that travel out of Nigeria is a ubiquitous or over-riding desire among those living in Africa. This simply wasn't borne out by the responses I received to my questionnaires in Jos. Asked whether they had any plans to leave Nigeria at some point in the future, 40 (70%) of respondents answered that they did, 11 (19%) that they did not, and 6 (11%) that they might if circumstances allowed. On the other hand, asked if they would ever consider leaving Nigeria permanently, 48 (84%) gave a definite negative, 5 (9%) said that they would and 4 (7%) that they might.

Linking this argument with the discussion which follows, I offer a final example from a much more comfortably positioned migrant which nevertheless demonstrates the retrospective certainty that habitus produces. What is equally clear again, in this example, is the way in which the economic position which facilitated his movement is elided, replaced by his account of an innate drive, the pseudo-prophetic ‘fire in the belly’ driving him on.

R: I realise[d] over time that those that I was actually looking up to in the society, that I actually admired in society were those that had some form of foreign training at the time, you know, uncles, relatives, and all that, you know. So time immemorial I’ve always been having it, *reinforcing in my subconscious that I have to have something foreign.* [...] [S]ome people would wonder why somebody that had an MBA by 11 years ago, I had my MBA 11 years ago, would be coming to school, an assistant vice-president in my bank, some people would feel there’s no point, what are you looking for? *You know, so that fire has always been in my belly. That ambition has always been there. The drive has always been there, you know, and it’s a....*

A: ...what, even since you were quite young?

R: ...yes, since I was quite young, I’ve always fired myself. The passion’s always been there, you know, to have something foreign, foreign in the sense that it’s international, not a particular place. International, in, in content and context. You know, so I wanted somewhere like that. And em, like I said, most of the Nigerians that have actually, um, proven themselves in different fields, you know, within Nigeria, are those that had some form of foreign training. [...] You know? So to me I said, look, if I want to different, if I’ve actually going to make myself very happy, because you see there’s a difference between just earning a wage and actually being happy, doing what you’re doing. And for you to be happy doing what you’re doing you must acquire those skills that are relevant to you doing those things that you like to do.

(Male, 36-50, Postgraduate student / Bank vice-president, M: teacher, F: teacher)

Migrancy and symbolic capital.

‘I have to have something foreign[.]’ This last example brings to the fore what I wish to move on to argue: that being a ‘been-to’ might itself be a form of symbolic capital, and therefore necessarily one that is contested by those who are denied access to it. Respondents in Nigeria, asked about whether there were changes apparent in those

who returned from time abroad almost universally stated that there were.²⁶ Those who had been abroad themselves were quite clear about the kind of effect it had:

R: Yes. We have learnt how to behave with modest [modesty?] and correct people about their undisciplined behaviour.
(Male, 21-35, Gemmologist, M: poultry farmer, F: businessman).

Those who had not left the national borders agreed that there was an effect. Their assessment of it ranged from open recognition of the economic benefits and the corresponding alterations in 'bodily hexis', to a deliberate counter-reading of the claim of distinction, including the suggestion that ultimately such claims of difference were based in a spurious pretence:

R: Any Nigerian who came back from abroad, will have a sound education and also have everything he needs for life. e.g. Money, and he will be self-discipline too.
(Male, 21-35, Cleaner, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R2: Yes - they look more heavy and big.

(Male, 21-35, On national service, M: civil servant, F: civil servant).

R3: Yes, there are differences in their attitudes: they don't want to suffer (ii) they want a better pay (iii) they want to hold a better position in the country.

(Male, 21-35, Teacher, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R4: Yes, differences in there social life, level of expoger [exposure?], time utility, Economy not leaving [living?] extravagantly money wise, well organise there curriculum. Neatness of there house. Thousand ways.

(Male, 21-35, Messenger, M: baker, F: electrician).

R5: Firstly, think it is all make-believe. These people see themselves as 'been-to', the difference is all pretence. The general attitude is that of always reminding you that things are 'gold and diamonds' overseas, place them in positions, you see they don't have the stuff!

(Male, 36-50, Contracted engineer, M: trader, F: driver).

R6: Yes. They are usually confused. They are cut up in mixed cultures. Only way out for them usually is to act more English than the English.

(Male, 51-65, Managing editor, M: trader, F: tailor).

This final comment represented easily the most common rebuttal to the distinguishing claims of returnees, a deliberate exposure of these claims in the negative light of loss of identity, an aping of foreign behaviour, a forgetfulness of the local ways of being. Hence a subjecthood, as that comment succinctly has it, 'cut up in mixed cultures.'

²⁶ Of the 53 respondents who replied to a question asking whether there were differences in the attitudes of Nigerians returning home after time abroad, 49 replied in the affirmative and 4 in the negative. In the elaboration of the type of differences they exhibited, 11 cited primarily positive facts - better self-control, politeness or simple economic advantage; 16 gave primarily negative reasons such as those quoted below and 22 saw a change that was either a mixture of benefits and losses or was ambiguous in some way.

R: Yes. Some tend to be exclusive or reserved as whites. They tend to be for 'themselves' alone. This is an African. We are our brothers keepers, we share, we are concern not only of our immediate family/relations but the community.

(Male, 36-50, 'Former publications editor', M: housewife, F: soldier).

R2: Most lost there sense of belonging, they lack their pride of been Nigerians and imitate the 'white man' who is black in the inside.

(Female, 21-35, State government worker, M: nurse, F: police officer).

R3: Yes. they act so displaced and find it difficult to fit in. Most of them end up being lazy and loose (sexually). They loose respect for other people unless they are as travelled (?) as they are but they're ok if they work hard.

(Female, 21-35, University student (psychology), M: beautician, F: mining engineer).

R4: They behave differently, some lose their traditional values and generally think like their hosts.

(Male, 21-35, 'Advert executive', M: teacher, F: insurance executive).

R5: Yes, They are always proud, some have changed accent and some talk more about those nations than their father land.

(Male, 21-35, School teacher, M: trader, F: soldier).

R6: Yes! They always think that they are much more civilised, richer, earn more property that make them proud.

(Male, 36-50, School teacher, M: groundnut farmer, F: pepper farmer).

R7: Yes: They are quite numerous. Their behaviour and mode of dressing. They hardly prostrate while greeting their elders. And also their dressing is such that it makes a nuisance of them.

(Female, Under 21, Student, M: teacher, F: contract builder).

There is clearly a contestation here over the allocation of value to expatriate experience and this points up the fact that it has already taken the form of a symbolic capital. The labelling of the 'been-to' and the coherence in the terms of response, both positive and negative, are indicators of the degree to which there is a question of symbolic differentiation being played out that is related to, but nevertheless separate from, the more direct economic and educational capital accruements of time abroad.²⁷

[S]ymbolic capital [...] is not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as capital, that is, as force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognised as legitimate. (Bourdieu, 2000, 242)

It is partly, I would suggest, this distinction of the 'been-to' that accounts for the occasional sense among migrants here in Britain²⁸ of their being pre-destined, certain to occupy that specific social position (which, in the case of migrancy, takes the form

²⁷ This is not a radically new recognition. As Hannerz points out, the 'been-to' has been a 'conspicuous social type' in Nigeria from the late colonial period (1997, 13), and Goody and Groothues (1977) discuss the superadded 'extra virtue' associated with the trip to Britain.

²⁸ To repeat what has already been noted in the introduction, I am talking here about those I have interviewed, which is to say, largely voluntary migrants, rather than those forced into exile. Obviously expatriate status in the context of necessary or enforced exile is a very different question.

of a specific geographical position) which they do. It is, in a real sense, a matter of assurance and of the subject's certainty, courtesy of the effects of habitus already discussed, that their occupation of a particular position is both fully justified and fully to be expected:

All forms of social consecration or statutory assignment [...] have this effect of increasing the right to the rarest possibles, and, through this *assurance*, of increasing the subjective capacity to realize them in practical terms. (Bourdieu, 1996, 261. Italics in the original.)

Like all symbolic capital of course, the distinction of the 'been-to' comes out of an investment (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1997 [1983]) specifically the difficulties and losses of time abroad. Simultaneously, of course, this may represent the course of an investment aimed towards the attainment of educational capital, or the gaining of a position in the political field for example. Still, something of the sense of this investment and the costs it is seen to exact are in this comment from one interviewee:

R: [These have been] quite interesting four years for me, [but] definitely you can look back and say, well, you've lost something, you've lost 4 years of your life and where the previous 28 years had, in terms of the social interaction and bonds and friendships, I mean, you left all those things behind and you came to a different country, so, these four years have been... sometimes we derisively you know, describe it as 'suspended animation', that somebody staying abroad is, is just, you know, existing, not really living because it takes quite sometime to... get, you know, really embedded in this foreign culture and you hardly can, can achieve that.
(Male, 21-35, University lecturer, M: trader, F: trader).

This symbolic capital, of course, does not offer equal returns for everyone. It was notable that among the interviewees in Britain there were those who were apprehensive about how their return would be understood. The following is a section from an interview with a young woman who was born in Nigeria and grew up in both the UK and Africa. I have just asked whether she feels women are treated with less respect in Nigeria:

R: That's true cause male dominates and eh, it's like, I mean do you know that they're allowed to have as many wives as they want?
A: Yeah.
R: And, I mean, fathers, when it comes to the first born they want a boy instead of a girl. Because they think, men are just, its just more superior. They can do things

better, they feel like their name'll have been kept, because the woman (something) married but the man keeps the name. So I think that's another reason as well.

A: So it would make it difficult for you going back would it, or not?

R: Hmmm. Yeah. Cause I'll be given a name, there's a special name for like, people like me like me they've went somewhere, they've got an education and became independent. [...] It's like, it's like... witch.

A: Right.

R: It's like calling somebody a witch right. [...] What's the word, it's like 'Weery'. It's quite, (laughs) I don't even know how you spell it. [...] Yeah? It's... Another thing they'll treat me differently it's like, they'll say that I'm proud as well, they'll be loads of names...

A: Because you were an independent woman? Uh-huh, educated.

R: And stuff like that. They won't actually treat me like a Nigerian anymore, as well. They (?) cannot pass over that betrayal. I find out when I go back that I don't get treated like a proper Nigerian.

(Female, 21-35, University student, M: university student, F: businessman).

This certainly implies something of what we have seen presented in Emecheta's *Kehinde*, that for women in particular, the social reading of the distinction of the 'been-to' might be filtered through a defensive patriarchal attack on potential female independence, both economically and socially.²⁹

What this section as a whole brings us to, I hope, is a new way of approaching the conjunction so regularly offered between migrancy and vision. Instead of taking the correlation at face-value, we might ask why the correlation itself has become so self-evident. Habitus theory, at least, would suggest that any quasi-automatic association of certain experience with an access to special social 'vision' is expressive of a claim to distinction, in this case, that of the 'been-to.' For example, then, one interviewee contacted me after her first trip to Nigeria for over 20 years, made in order to meet a family which she admitted not having recognised, nor being recognised by, on arrival at Lagos airport. It became quite clear as she discoursed on

²⁹ One of the few other statements of trepidation over returning to Nigeria was the following comment from a migrant doctor. His concern stood out primarily because of his eschewing of that rhetoric of enlightenment presented by so many interviewees:

R: [A] lot of people in senior, senior people in Nigeria even in medical profession, have been abroad, have been to Britain, and it was a shock for me to see that the way they were behaving back in Nigeria was quite different from the way they will have behaved here. And having been here and seen things done in a better way, they, they did not come back to improve things [T]hat gets me worried about Nigeria, because it also makes me to think: will I be the same? Do you understand? Right, just something in the system that makes this difference and until I go back I probably won't be able to answer that.

(Male, 21-35, medical doctor, M: trader, F: school teacher)

Nigeria's political problems, on corruption, and in general on what needed to be done to the country, that she felt her position as a returnee had granted her a peculiar insight. As she said of the people she met:

R: Through their way of talking you see right inside them.
(Female, 51-65, Shop owner, M: housewife, F: 'chief').

There could hardly be a clearer statement of the been-to's claim to see beyond the surface. The claim that they are, as Fanon had it, the ones 'who know.' (1968, 24)³⁰ This claim to the epiphanic knowledge of the migrant can easily occur in reverse and there is no intended implication here of a merely one-way effect. Contacting the same interviewee a little later she had reconsidered the terms of her experience. Thinking about her return from Nigeria, she talked about realising the degree to which subjects in Europe were 'living in a plastic world' as opposed the 'real world' of those in Africa. The last time I met her she had sold her small business in order, she told me, to spend the remainder of her life travelling.

Not all interviewees expressed themselves so starkly. Indeed, interviewing in this respect can be misleading and this in itself marks an important fact. It is one thing to ask how the experience of migrancy has altered perceptions generally, or of Britain or Nigeria in particular. By and large this enquiry was met with the kind of recognitions of small-scale cultural differences that might be taken to imply Bhabha's shifting double frame of vision:

R: I wouldn't say, I wouldn't say it has changed [my opinions] as such ... to a certain extent, I would rather (?) say that there are a lot of differences in our customs. A Nigerian custom and a Britain custom. And em, there is no doubt that we have learned some which are very good, you know, to imitate. And there are many which are, which er ... we don't buy it. So, going back now we see a difference between the two customs, and we interact them, compare, contrast, and pick anyone which is better.

³⁰ This statement is strikingly reminiscent of Buchi Emecheta's statements on African-based writers, which were in fact picked out by Chinua Achebe recently for criticism. 'Writing coming from Nigeria, from Africa [...] sounds quite stilted. [...] *Even if you remove the cover you can always say who is an African writer. But with some of my books you can't tell that easily anymore because, I think, using the language everyday and staying in the culture my Africanness is, in a way, being diluted.*' (Wilkinson, 1992, 39; see also Achebe, 2000, 72).

(Male, 51-65, Pastor, M: farmer, F: farmer).

As I have said, however, the intention of using Bourdieu in this chapter is to suggest that the interrogation of altered ‘points of view’ in this respect, which is one of the few strategies open to interview research, is in fact less important than looking at the alterations in *position* of view. That is to say, the legitimacy of the position from which points of view are stated, from which ‘position-takings’ are made. Asked about the alterations of attitude to which they felt their expatriate experience had given rise, respondents made various claims from the empathetic to the assertion of ‘enlightenment’, to the truth-claims of actual experience vis-à-vis the dreams of the sedentary local:

R: I think it has helped me to, um, stop looking to myself, but to try and put myself in the position of others, it has helped me to be more accommodating coz there are times when I’ve not had it too easy[.]

(Female, 21-35, University student, M: Nursing tutor, no father).

R2: As for how Britain has changed my attitudes [..travel..] it’s always, you know, enlightening, it makes you more open minded, or I would say it has made me more open minded at least, to know just the fact that people are different and I pretty much accept anything now, I’m not bothered by anyone or anything [...] I’m not bothered by people having different or having ... rather extreme behaviour compared to mine if you see what I’m saying, even things that are very, so much different from the way I was brought up just seems to me like normal. I’ve seen so many different aspects of life.

(Male, 21-35, University student, M: Guesthouse manager, F: Hospital manager).

R3: You see the Nigerian, in Nigeria, they always say, things are better here [i.e. in the West], it’s more exciting here. It’s like a dreamland. It’s like a child’s dreamland of Disneyworld. It’s like that, it’s so stupid.

(Female, 21-35, University student, M: university student, F: businessman).

Obviously migrant experience does change attitudes and does expose the subject to contrasting cultural forms. My intention here is not in any sense to contest these facts, but to point out how migrant status can become a symbolic capital of its own, so that the new points of view which are produced by time abroad become the marks of a position whose status and claims are inflated, in that quasi-magical sense of any contested capital, beyond the direct results of experience itself. The recurrently visual paradigm of these statements, ‘enlightenment’, to have seen deeper or wider, hence to appreciate the cultural games as games, are absolutely correspondent with the general

claim of all forms of distinction, the base statement of which is the subject's assertion that they are no longer 'sunk', as it were, in the social *illusio* but are elevated in such a manner as to read it strategically, playfully or in some sense freed from its direct impingements upon them. In the words of the interviewees just cited: to no longer 'be bothered', or to recognise the aspirations of those still in the homeland as the dreams of children.

This goes some way to explaining the fact, which must be confusing for the postcolonial take on migrant subjectivities, that many of the interviewees were definite in asserting that their perspectives on Nigeria had *not* changed while they were abroad:

R: My views about politics in Nigeria *have not changed* because *I've tried to detach myself from any sentiments*, I've tried to look at politics from the point of view of how it shall benefit the country. Right, and if you ask me I have no problems with the military continuing to rule Nigeria, I personally have no problem with that.

(Male, 36-50, Postdoctoral researcher, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R2: I'm still in debt to the country [Nigeria], but at the same time I have my obligation to this country [...] So, I have respect for both societies. So, em, I my, attitude to life as it relates to either the UK or Nigeria *hasn't changed*, you know, fundamentally.

(Male, 36-50, University lecturer, M: Trader, F: 'Public Works Department').

R3: I always had an idea that most probably things aren't the way they should be, ok, so er, its not like I needed any confirmation, but obviously, looking at British politics, you know, er, its one major departure from what we have back there, ok, so I would say that being here may have *re-enforced an existing belief*.

(Male, 21-35, Doctoral student (microbiology), M: trader, F: farmer).

If existing beliefs have been re-enforced - if points of view have not changed - positions of view indisputably have. Supplementary and tied into to the legitimacy conferred by the symbolic capital of a time abroad is the fact that expatriate life has been a major arena of political manoeuvring among the Nigerian elite.³¹ This paradoxical sense of being inside on the outside, as it were, is bolstered by the fact

³¹ As Hakim Adi has shown, expatriate Nigerian student politics have certainly had influential relation to future developments in Africa, so that, for an elite group there was an important building of connections overseas (1994, 107-128). We can see very clearly here how, as Bourdieu argues, forms of symbolic capital can be tied to and expressive of, the development of social capital - i.e. the establishment of a nexus of personal connections and obligations. (Bourdieu, 1997). We might think also of Anderson's rather ignored discussion in *Imagined Communities* of the 'creole pioneers' (1991,

that there is, at a certain level, greater access to information about events in Nigeria available from inside the West. This is the case especially given the availability of inter-net based news services which many of those I talked to employed on a regular basis.

R: [O]ne thing I've kept on doing at least for the last three years, is that I have the net and I know that there are Nigerian newspapers on the net so I am in constant touch, I feel as if you like, psychologically, I'm attached to Nigeria as, you know, any other person, so I know what is happening, sometimes even honestly, we get to, you know, hear what has happened in Nigeria, before those back home, you know get the information. So, so, to that extent, yeah, I still feel every bit as, as you know, committed to the Nigerian Dream[.]³²
(Male, 21-35, University lecturer, M: trader, F: trader).

The possibility cannot be dismissed, of course, that this final statement also represents a pre-emptive defence against the charge of severance with which we have already seen the distinction of the 'been-to' being resisted on return to Nigeria. What is noticeable is that *both* this interviewee's justification of his position-takings on Nigerian politics, as well as such rebuttals of expatriate pronouncements as Onoge's scathing comments on "cultural half-castes' [...] with their double vision' (1985, 30) are couched in a rhetoric of sight. It is not that this is somehow a mistaken syntax; migrants can often have privileged practical access to knowledge of events and of the forth-coming formations of the field. But it *also* true that the key denomination of the *symbolic capital of migrancy* is always one of sight, of vision. And this involves something which is symbolically super-added to the pragmatic 'social capital' to which the elite expatriate community may have access. The claimed ability to see 'right inside' is the main currency of the been-to's distinction.³³

47-65) and the importance of journeys to the west in the imagining of new, postcolonial nations (113-140).

³² This obviously raises interesting questions over the degree to which Anderson's analysis of the imagined community and its key disseminating mechanism, the print-media, are altered and attenuated in the context of new electronic forms.

³³ Hence it is precisely against this idea that Ngugi's puts to use, via Armah, that most visual of metaphors, Plato's allegory of the cave. Too often in Africa, Ngugi argues, those who have 'escaped the cave' return flourishing their distinction, particularly linguistic distinction, and in so doing only serve to re-erect a veil in front of the people: "The peasant and worker in Africa have done all they

This, of course, brings us full circle, back to those other figures of outsider vision from the romantic poet to the modernist flaneur. As already discussed, Bourdieu has written extensively about the development of the *life* of the bohemian artist, of a relation to time that justified a way of seeing which, being (apparently) disinterested, allowed the artist to reveal truths of the social game and of goals that eluded those who were busily pursuing them. What is noticeable here is the degree to which the distinction claimed by the 'been-to' is the same distinction ascribed to the migrant artist and writer in much recent theorising. 'I've tried to detach myself from any sentiments' one of the interviewees says above. It seems a strange paradox, given the fact that postcolonial theory so valuably insists that we take cognisance of the place from which we speak, that it has still emphasised as its emblematic figure the migrant, whose position between frames - whose 'detachment' - is their singularity. We need to recognise, courtesy of Bourdieu, that in laying claim to the symbolic capital of the 'been-to', of the migrant, critical theory is only grasping at the most recent version of a long-standing currency of distinction.³⁴

Migrant narratives.

I began this chapter with the idea of an iterology from Rapport and Dawson. This final section starts with a re-statement of a similar idea in similar fashion. Nikos Papastergiadis' *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000) regularly attacks 'neat binarisms and linear oppositions' (20), promoting instead a variety of 'multivectorial' or

could to send their sons and daughters to schools and universities at home and abroad in order to scout for knowledge and skills which could relieve the community of these burdens but, lo and behold, each of them comes back speaking in tongues.' (1998, 78)

³⁴ If, as Spivak argues, the western resident academic or writer is both privileged and forcibly limited by their auratic association with the non-west, then it is arguable that this represents the obverse side of the symbolic capital of the returning expatriate.

‘multivariate’ replacement metaphors ranging from a form of social chaos theory to that of circuitry and fuzzy logic to the eponymous turbulence.³⁵ The fact that the book continually lays claim to the academic high ground of greater complexity, however, does not prevent him from making the remarkably uncomplicated diagnosis: ‘all identity is formed through dislocation.’ (53) Or, as he says elsewhere, identity is ‘trajective’, a thing ‘formed by and in the journey.’ (4)

So far, so familiar. But there is something both odd and symptomatic that occurs here, an extraordinary coupling of (asserted) subjective experiences on the one hand and global scale alterations of order on the other. It seems, in other words, qualitatively justified to move from discussing the death of the individual subject in one breath to the death of the nation-state in the next. Hence the migrant is appropriated as the ‘metaphor for the complex forces which are integral to the radical transformations of modernity’ (2) of which they are also the product and, tautologously again, partial cause. Perhaps it might be possible to tack between these two poles, between the changes in economic formation that threaten the control facilities of the state and the alterations of identity forced on individuals whose movements are enabled, prevented or demanded by these same economic shifts. Perhaps, although it seems an extraordinary task, one could telescope a ‘deterritorialization’ of identity from the national level to that of individual human beings.³⁶ But how does it actually sit with the stories of their identity told by migrants? It is one thing to back up these claims with an analysis of such high cultural work as is represented by a Rushdie, Okri, Ofilei or Yinka Shonibare (see van der

³⁵ The Canclini of *Hybrid Cultures* argues a similar case. He also cites the rise of cultural migrations as an alteration that both contributes to and is expressive of a situation in which: ‘The classic paradigms with which domination was explained [are becoming] incapable of taking into account the dissemination of the centers, the multipolarity of social initiatives, the plurality of references[.]’ (1995, 259)

Veer, 1997, 103-105). These seem to be the limit of evidential material in Bhabha or Papastergiadis. But we already know about the correspondence between the staked out point of vision of the artist and that of the migrant. Where are the interviews with people without this highest form of cultural capital, without its correlate tendency to claim an external perspective, a distanced point of view?

In lieu of those absent from so much postcolonial writing, then, let me give a short example. At the time I interviewed this respondent, he was 54, studying theology in Glasgow during the week and returning to his family in London for the weekends. He had been here eight years. But his time outside of Nigeria was much more extensive:

A: Is this your first time overseas? Or have you been to the States at all, or Britain before?

R: Well, I've been to the United States of America, been to Germany, been to France...

A: You've travelled a lot?

R: I've been to Greece, Athens ... Holland, Belgium, Amsterdam. Many European countries.

(Male, 51-65, Pastor, M: farmer, F: farmer).

This lengthy itinerary of different destinations was unusual among those I talked to, the majority of whom, if they had the resources for further travel at all, used it for a return trip to see their families at home. I asked whether these were countries visited just on the basis of a kind of tourist travel:

R: Well, I do travel. And I do go for church meeting, the planting of churches. Another two or three weeks I should be in Italy. For a church. I have to travel to Italy by the half-term holiday here. That week I'll be in Italy.

A: So it's missionary work you're doing, travelling.

R: That's right, its missionary work.

So it became clear that here was the contemporary version of a very old narrative of migrancy, the apostolic journey. The frame of his story of movement, as it were, had its template in the New Testament account of the missionary expansion, the exporting

³⁶ It seems a rich irony, however, to use a *coupling* of coincident experiences between individual and national levels in order to talk about a *de-coupling* of the individual from national sentiment.

of the new faith in line with the great commission and, in particular, the Pauline travels.

A: Why was it that you came to Britain here, was it that this college did a course that you wanted to take? Or were there other reasons why you came to Britain?

R: Well, I had initially come for further studies in theology and so on. And that's what my mission was (?) As I said, I'm a minister of God of religion and I have my church in Nigeria. When I thought I should go for further studies in Britain ... initially.

A: And this happened to be Glasgow?

R: No, I was in London. When I go to London I had already attended [a] Bible college where I did my diploma in theology but at the same time I established churches as well. Many Nigerians in London and with my gift in the spirit, I started founding (?) churches and I started two churches so I have to abandon my studies to ... to allow me to bring up my churches. So after that I think that I have to finish my degree course.

[...]

A: How often do you go back to Nigeria?

R: I go at least once in a year. Two times, three times, but not less than once in a year.

A: To see your family, to see your churches?

R: To see my ... I still have extended family in Nigeria. And my churches are in Nigeria as well. So I have to go back to Nigeria every year for the church convention and conference.

Although this interviewee differed from those cited above in denying that his travels were dependent on his own volition, the idea of journey as mission is actually quite correspondent with that certainty of election that I have suggested was common among the migrants to whom I spoke. '[W]e depend,' he said, 'solemnly on God for direction.' This is the structure with which he told his life overseas, a journey determined by an ordained task. This was his iterological frame.

Does this narrative of identity, and of how identity is affected by migrancy, in any way embrace a new and apparently definitive decoupling of place and belonging? We might well expect it to, given the New Testament's promotion of a rhetoric of Christian separateness, spiritual homelessness.³⁷ But far from it. In fact, it was quite

³⁷ As Kristeva (1991, chapter 4) analyses in her brilliant historical portrait of the stranger, the early church found its cosmopolitan unity in a shared sense of estrangement from the world. When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews recalls Abraham's exile at the behest of his God, it is clear that the message is pointed at a new community, cemented by the knowledge that 'we are homeless', as Paul reminds the early church in Corinth. We might all the more expect, therefore, this interviewee to adopt that detachment from place in line with the believer's faith that they are 'aliens and strangers in the world.'

clear that the interviewee used the framework of the apostolic commission in order to explain a time away from home and as a means to live with that estrangement.

R: [O]n me, personally, if I have to decide on my own say, then I say immediately when I finish my course, I will return to Nigeria. But it depends on the direction ... of the Lord. If the Lord says that I should stay for sometime I will do it. But I know eventually I will go back. [...] You see, if you look at my age, I am 54, getting old and I think I have a duty to perform, to my generation, my people, so I have the burden of a ministry to my home people in Nigeria[...] Any Nigerian, I won't say ... I would say any African coming here must have it as a duty to return to that continent and help its people. [...] Any honest Nigerian coming abroad here, must have it behind him to return to his people and assist them in whatever way he can do.

He was expressing only what the majority of my interviewees asserted in different ways, an unequivocal sense of where they belonged, and of their debt to that place and its people. Many of those already cited specifically made statements of this sort:

R: [O]ver the years one has learned a lot of things and I believe that eh, one can go home and, transfer the skills one has acquired. And that way you, one, will be contributing towards the development of the country. [...] I see myself as being here purely because there are skills I believe I can learn here which on going home I can transfer and, and help in the development of my country, then I can always know that for my stay here is for the moment. [...]The reason I say that is this, I have been in this country for 8 years. That I have seen things that are useful to Nigeria and indeed Third World countries, it's by choice. Some people come here and they narrow their view, they focus it purely on the academics they have come to do, they don't broaden their vision to see other things and, and how they can relate to, to their country. And therefore those people earn a certificate here, they will have worked with sophisticated people here, they go back there and (don't?) and claim that government back at home is not supporting them. And they say they cannot do anything, it's a disgrace for anyone to come here and study their subject say like chemistry and go back and tell me that they having nothing to do at home. It's a disgrace. What it means is that they, they simply narrow their vision to what they have done here purely research, and they gone back and indeed the research they have done here is not to satisfy the needs of Nigeria. Because this country is advanced they wouldn't go back to do basic research, they will give you a research project that is only relevant to the problem. It's now left for you to, to relate that to your problems at home. Go back home and see what are the problems, and then devise research projects along those problems. You don't say well, because I did a research in, in a higher Tec (?) maybe a, a nuclear problem, I can only do research in a nuclear problem. That is nonsense.

(Male, 36-50, Postdoctoral researcher, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R2: One can't, I can't run away from it and I don't think any Nigerian can run away from the fact that home is home, no matter ... you can live here for twenty, thirty years, one day you're going to go back home. And one of my friends said, the sooner you go back the better it is for you because it's easier to settle down, a lot better than when you've lived here for so many years, you find it very strange and difficult to settle. That's how I feel, I feel strongly about it.

(Male, 21-35, Doctoral student (chemistry), M: trader, F: trader).

R3: The main reason why I'm here, is to learn so much about Britain, er, British experiences over time, er, the challenges it, she has met and how she had overcome especially the health facet, and see what we can borrow and modify taking cognisance of our cultural differences, and, implement them back home. That is why I'm here, actually.

(Male, 21-35, Public health researcher, M: housewife, F: adult education officer).

R4: The point is I think I'm, I'm completely committed to, to working and advancing myself in Nigeria, which obviously would take along with it advancing whoever, you know, is in contact with me. Er, I'm not sure, you know, whether I can accede from point of view of this patriotism thing (gain?) you know, I just feel very, very Nigerian, you know.

(Male, 21-35, Doctoral student (microbiology), M: trader, F: farmer).

R5: I don't look forward to staying in Britain or any other foreign country permanently, em, I know when I was living in Nigeria honestly, I did (?) say that I'd end up three years and coming back to this country and.. one thing I've never hesitated to tell friends and people I've come in contact with is that I'm interested in politics, I've got a social conscience and em, some of the things that have happened in Nigeria over the past, maybe, two decades or maybe since I kind of became aware, um, have you know appalled me, you know, and... we have a great country, potentially a great country there with the resources, particularly human, you know, not to talk of the vast natural endowments, but you see, we, we, we've not really realised our potentials and it saddens me, I never have ever, I've never seen myself as a messiah but I do know that em, you know, if there's any contribution that anybody could make, one should try making such contributions and to that extent I see my role as er, getting back to Nigeria em, soon enough and joining the struggle.

(Male, 21-35, University lecturer, M: trader, F: trader).

We could, of course, argue that these statements of local loyalty are defences learned by rote, mere cultural gesture, or charge that they are the mistaken hangovers of nationalist sentiment. Neither seems an acceptable analysis to me. This is not to suggest that we take such altruistic descriptions of the subject's migrancy at full face value. Enough of those I interviewed were open about the economic rewards of their time abroad to recognise other motives for going home. Furthermore, if it is correct to see the 'been-to' status as a form of symbolic capital then there is no escaping the fact that it is a capital that achieves realisation with the homebound flight. In this respect, to return may also be to *receive* a return on the cachet of time abroad. One of the interviewees cited above, expressed all this in fairly clear terms:

R: [When I return] a lot will be expected from me [...]The beauty of being in a foreign country is not the foreign country itself but the fact the foreign country provides an opportunity for you to interface with a multiplicity of people from other nations, like in my class you've got people from [something] you've got people from all parts of the world, so it's like the sort of internationalisation of your mind, so you know have a global view of life, a global view of issues, you do, by another [time type?] *they expect you to take those global issues to bear on the local, the local setting, that is think globally, but act locally, so by so doing you expect a more improved way of doing things coming from you, so they look up to you and expect you to give them leadership.* So that's, that's the thrust. So a lot's going to be expected no doubt, no doubt, when I get home. [...] *I know that at the end of the day, when I get back to Nigeria, the experience I will have gathered, I'll be able to bring it to bear, as an ombudsman as it were, you know? Elder statesman.*

(Male, 36-50, Postgraduate student / Bank vice-president, M: teacher, F: teacher)

Even, however, if we are as cynical as to assume these statements to be nothing but rhetorical camouflage for wholly self-interested intentions, they still offer scant support to the idea that identity is being de-coupled from place. Unless, that is, cultural theory intends to jettison description altogether and take up a new, prescriptive task. There are times when this is what Papastergiadis appears to advocate:

The key task for cultural theorists today is to develop more relational modes for thinking through politics of cultural transformation, and to propose a discourse which challenges the stultifying binarisms that have hitherto pincerred the sensibilities of the modern world[.] (2000, 105)

In the light of this new, grandiose role for social theory, we can appreciate again why the migrant has such emblematic value. From where else but from a point above all the old, redundant groundings, could such a task be launched?

Conclusion.

Part of Papastergiadis' intention is to insist on the degree to which cultural factors have been overlooked in traditional economic and sociological theories of migration.

Sociologists have underestimated the extent to which migration is based on the transmission of ideas, stories told by other migrants, rumours of opportunity, the strutting of returnees[.] (Papastergiadis, 2000, 47)

There can hardly be any disagreement about this. I have, after all, just been discussing the symbolic capital of the 'been-to', and a particular migrant whose movement was clearly motivated - although obviously not enabled - by cultural factors. Nor could there be argument with the desire to recover a recognition of individual agency (as with Rapport and Dawson) from the grip of an economic determinism. But what this

becomes is the complete omission of the ways in which economics affect movement³⁸ and the deliberate refusal of any attempt to argue that capitalism might be understood as a *system*, and therefore systematically. This leads to the depressing conclusion that looking for order in a map of contemporary migration ‘would be like looking for order in chaos theory.’ (Papastergiadis, 2000, 24) And if this is the case, if attempts to describe and make account are redundant, social theory may as well become just another competing story, a prescription of its own.

What such an analysis also relies on, as we have seen, is the assertion, here courtesy of Appadurai, that:

[T]he concept of the imaginary and the workings of the imagination have a more central role in the formation of these new social and cultural practices. (Papastergiadis, 2000, 119)

This expansion of the cultural, I have argued above, cannot be understood outside of a recognition of the degree to which the imaginary is increasingly an aspect of the market, the linguistic or symbolic mode extraordinarily incorporated into commodity production. An attempt to evade economic determinism becomes misleading where it fails to account for the degree to which material facts - the number of guns, the costs of lawyers, whether you grew up in a home on University land, whether your travel is subsidised by a missionary group - impinge upon and determine the authority of discursive statements. Perhaps we should recall, in the context of migrancy, Marx’s deceptively simple statement: ‘If I have no money to travel, I have no *need* - that is, no real and self-realizing need - to travel’ (1970 [1844], 168). Marx’s recollection is the simple but profound one that under capitalist conditions movement is possible not on the basis of desire, imagination nor language, but on the basis of money for tickets and all the attendant expenses. The early chapters of this thesis sought to underline a

tendency to critical amnesia over this point among what I termed ‘new romanticism’, and chapter three in particular sought to reinstate a recognition of institutional factors that underlie the dominance of certain types of migrant writing in western literary debates. This chapter, for its part, has pointed out a similar process at work in the ‘iterological’ projects of Nigerian expatriates in the UK. In both cases, we can see how a disavowal of the material is part of the typical misrecognition by which all forms of cultural capital are constituted. In the former case this refers to the levels of consecrated capital held by academic high-theorists, in the latter, what I have termed the symbolic capital of the ‘been-to’. This last, specific form of capital however, is necessarily reliant on a context in which its distinction is redeemable. It seems to me that it is this last point that much current theorising of migrancy ignores. Bourdieu’s work helps us theorise the importance of narrative in people’s lives, without ignoring the ways in which such narratives are entangled with structures of domination, therefore offering a corrective to the mistaken assumption that identitarian politics are becoming de-linked from place.

Chapter 6: Imaginative Knowledge and Migrant Fiction.

A number of the chapters prior to this have begun with a nod to Marx, a fact that highlights my agreement with Neil Lazarus' statement (1999a, 15) that, for the first time since the flowering of postcolonial studies in the Western academy, a body of materialist work has developed within the field which represents more than just the accumulation of occasional acts of guerrilla critique. To keep continuity then, but also to recognise that Marx should not be treated as the voice of an infallible Truth, I turn to that brief and somewhat puzzling speculation, amended to the introduction of the *Grundrisse*, in which he poses a question at once similar and different from that raised in this chapter. His conundrum, it will be remembered, concerns the relationship between artistic and social developments and the apparently out-of-time flourishing of art in certain 'undeveloped' periods. This initial problem slips, however, in the course of a half-page or so, into a rather different query. How is it, Marx asks, in relation to Greek art forms:

that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model[?] (Marx, 1973 [1858], 111)

As Macherey has said (1978, 67 forwards), Marx's answer appears initially to seem rather too easy. It suggests that what we find aesthetically pleasing in the imaginative production of past periods arises from something like nostalgia, tied up with the knowledge that the social conjunction which made such art possible can never be revisited. To Marx then, the formula of this appreciation, with Paul's New Testament admonition in the background,¹ is 'joy in the child's naïveté', a kind of grand historical version of just that retrospective certainty discussed in the previous chapter.

I will try to argue later that there may be more to be said about this, that some less comfortable conclusion might be extrapolated from Marx himself. For the meantime, however, and leaving aside the historical teleology that frames Marx's form of the puzzle, I simply want to use his question to pivot the term 'migrant narrative' on its axis. In the previous section of this thesis I dealt with stories made by migrants out of their experience. The other way in which to read the phrase however, the other way in which to raise the question, is to look at the migrancy of narratives themselves. Hence, a variant on Marx's question: how is it (indeed *is it*) the case that works of imaginative production from one social context can be meaningful to those who receive them in another social scenario? What this chapter deals with then, is the reception of a 'classic' Nigerian novel among readers for whom its existence was unexpected. In this particular case, the encounter with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* among groups of Scottish readers taking adult education courses in Glasgow's Govan and Gorbals districts as well as in Stranraer, Dumfries and Dalbeattie. This is supplemented by reading group material from a session in Fife² and by comparative evidence from Nigeria.

It was not my intention to use Marx here only to propose the motion. The question of the cross-cultural reception of imaginative material has been asked enough times before for there to be any number of alternative candidates for that job of simple preface. It is, for example, a question faced by reflexive anthropology and is broached in this context by Clifford Geertz in his essay 'Found in Translation' (1983,

¹ Marx re-writes a secular version of Paul's determination to put away 'childish things' just as he is elsewhere dismissive of those who seek a return to some utopian re-formulation of feudal certainties: 'A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish.' (Marx, 1973, 111)

² The Fife reading group consisted of nine members and was not constituted simply for the purposes of this research, it being an established social meeting. Participants agreed to read *Things Fall Apart* and allow me to listen to their subsequent discussion as well as pose questions about their responses. The participants were primarily middle-class and in the age-range between 36 and 65.

41-54).³ I begin with Marx because to do so is to be reminded of a pertinent fact, and once again we are back in the territory of Benjamin's 'The Storyteller.' As Macherey argues (1978, 6-7) the focus of Marx's question, even in this short passage, is shifted from the differential development of art in various social backgrounds⁴ to the way in which art from another time and place affects a 'distant' reader. By focusing on the consumption of art, Marx alters the nature of the question to something familiar in his work, and in this thesis: the frame of estrangement. The term he uses here is not the theoretically laden *entäussern* (to alienate), nor *entfremden* (to estrange), but the very direct *unerreichbare* (unobtainable or beyond reach). What I infer from this, or what I take it to licence, is a reading of this brief speculation in the context of his theorising of commodity circulation as a whole. *Capital*, after all, poses a not dissimilar puzzle: how is it that a thing basically *strange* to us, the alienated commodity, is both exchangeable and desirable? How is it that it has meaning or value? In examining, if only briefly, the ability of art from past social formations to move us, Marx seems to be posing the same question in a different way. Or, perhaps, a different question in revealingly similar terms.

Productive as this line of inquiry would no doubt prove to be, I want to let it stand for the moment. The pertinent reminder lies in the mention of the commodity and the attendant recollection of an obvious fact, forgettable exactly because it seems so apparent. Simply put, that 'fictions' under capitalism become 'migrant' *in as much* as they exist as commodities: as books for sale, as items for libraries, as textual raw material for processing in various educational arenas. If *Things Fall Apart* is a 'migrant narrative', its migrancy is no longer a function of its status as the property of

³ See also John Frow (1998, 53-68) and, with a discussion of the limits of a relativist position with specific relation to Geertz: Uzo Esonwanne (1993, 49-62).

⁴ That is to say, away from a literary application of his comment: 'Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape' (1973, 105)

one who wanders, whether African griot or European troubadour.⁵ Its journey is made on the eddies of global trade specific to cultural forms. Whatever else this is taken to mean, it has the result that even for an adult reader previously unacquainted with any African authored fiction, picking up a copy of *Things Fall Apart* is, despite the very definite unfamiliarity of the material, still a familiar experience in as much as this cultural commodity is like any other cultural commodity. Its difference is not unexpected. The moment of purchase is attenuated because the novel came to most of these readers as part of a whole pedagogic package, but this does not directly change the fact. Although Achebe provides a very different perspective on colonialism than was familiar to many of these readers, his book does not have that radical otherness which Marx allocates to the work from another social epoch. I am not talking here about the possible criticism of Achebe for having being too willing to translate Igbo history into the 'Great Tradition' of the European novel, although given the already discussed mechanisms by which books get published this is obviously not an inconsequential consideration.⁶ What I simply mean to point out is that the reception of the culturally unknown always threatens to partake of that tourist-fodder 'newness', the commodification of the 'cultural other', which Clifford describes as 'strangely familiar and different precisely in that unprocessed familiarity.' (1992, 97)

Before continuing, a note on the constitution of the groups whose responses are to be examined. The essays received were as follows: there were 18 from 2 concurrent groups in Stranraer (6 male, 12 female); 3 from a small group in the Gorbals (1 male, 2 female); 7 from Dalbeattie (all female); 5 from Dumfries (all

⁵ That said, I have tried earlier to point to the valency between expatriate status and likelihood of adoption by Western publishers that African writers have to take into account.

⁶ It is certainly a valid point that Achebe's work is, in part, an intervention in and against the high cultural tradition of British writing and, as is well known, against Cary and Conrad in particular. To assume that this means that the novel is somehow partially pre-digested to help aid European readers

female) and 6 from Govan (1 male, 5 female). The age range of the groups was split into three broad categories, retired people who were taking the course from interest, a group in the middle and late thirties (primarily women who were trying to get into university after having raised a family) and a smaller number of participants in their early twenties who had left school prior to their Higher level exams and were looking to gain entry to the access course. Those in the Govan, Gorbals and Dumfries groups tended to be from an unskilled or semi-skilled manual working background including domestic work, whether paid or unpaid. Those in the Stranraer and Dalbeattie groups came a more mixed social background including a number of participants retired from clerical work and also younger people working in the low-pay personal service economy.

Critical distance and re-plotting the story.

R: I must admit that my initial reaction on seeing the book was a sinking feeling. I felt that of all the books chosen that was the one I really had no inclination whatsoever to read. It may sound insular, but I am not interested in Africa[.]

(Female, over 65, ex-housewife and voluntary worker, M: not given, F: vet).

R2: Wandering around a bookshop or library, I would never have looked at, or chosen a book with a title, "THINGS FALL APART". The author's name unknown to me, although, from the cover, obviously he, or she, is African.

(Female, 51-65, ex-telephonist, M: housekeeper, F: spot welder).⁷

The path of the bulk of this material into my research does not sit very well with the normal template of social scientific investigation. The encounter between these Scottish readers and *Things Fall Apart* takes place as part of a pre-access course⁸ taught under the auspices of Glasgow University's Department of Adult and

not only does an injustice to Achebe's writing, but overlooks the fact that for the majority of these readers the 'Great Tradition' is about as unfamiliar fictional territory as *Things Fall Apart* itself.

⁷ This, and all the subsequent quotes from the essays are presented as received. Any emphasis has been added.

⁸ The pre-access course offers participants a series of short classes on various subject areas and is intended as an introduction for students who are planning to apply for the University entrance access

Continuing Education. It was, in this respect, an impelled meeting and, as the first quote above suggests, not always relished. At the end of the course, those who took part were asked to write a one thousand word essay, structured as they deemed relevant, detailing their reaction to the novel. With their permission it is these essays that I am primarily drawing upon here. Background information comes from a short questionnaire that students generously filled out, and from informal conversations over the two and half months of each session.

These, then, are responses produced towards the end of a course in which I, inevitably, had been pushing my own agenda on the novel. It becomes necessary to at least pose the question of whether this constitutes ‘valid’ qualitative evidence. I do not mean this in some strong empiricist sense because clearly the researcher can never take up an entirely non-contaminating position in relation to the material gathered. Nevertheless, acting as tutor is about as far from objectivity as it is possible to get. Pre-empting entirely understandable methodological criticism then, two points. One is that I have tried to treat this material with the circumstances of its production in mind. This has meant a continual recollection of the fact that the social and historical background into which the novel has been placed for these readers is, partially, something framed in the course of tutorials. It also means recognising the instrumental way in which essays of this sort are approached, even where there is no official assessment on the agenda. It is, after all, a more or less accurate reading of the social scenario of teaching that led some of the essayists to frame their responses as a search for a putative ‘right answer.’

Nevertheless, and this second point should hopefully become apparent, many of the reactions offered did demonstrate a real resiliency, a determined independence

course. It has, in this respect, a fairly open structure and there is no assessment or grading involved, nor any necessity to achieve a pass-mark.

both of the perspectives offered in classes but also ‘against the grain’ of the novel itself. A brief example might demonstrate something of this. In this quotation the essayist is questioning the novel’s relationship to historical occurrence.

R: [I]s the story ‘Things Fall Apart’ a story formed in the mind of Chinua Achebe or is a tale taken authentically from research and investigation, I will go along with the latter!
(Male, 51-65(?), ex-merchant navy, parents’ occupations: not given).

What is notable here is that the reader, while accepting that the actions of colonialism presented in the novel are true to broad historical fact, does so in such a way as to highlight the provisional nature of this acceptance. In other words, not being in a position to directly refute whatever I might have said in tutorials to that effect, the reader nevertheless retains control over their response by emphasising in this first sentence that the essay which follows is based on a kind of begrudging suspension of disbelief. If this is insufficient to refute social scientific concerns about the evidence used here it should certainly be clear by the end of the chapter that the one thing I did not receive were a series of carbon-copies of my own opinions.

There is a further, perhaps more elusive methodological question, although it relates to those above. In asking it I am trying to take seriously Spivak’s insistence that the humanities always investigate and recall the history of their disciplinary institutionalisation (e.g. 1999, 203 forwards; see also Azim, 10-33). One of the motifs of the course, as might be expected, was a discussion of the intentions and effects of colonialism. Bourgeois society in the imperial period, however, was busy consolidating itself not just in the face of a ‘racial’ other. The metropolitan ruling-classes also recognised groups who, while geographically more local, were considered similarly distant in culture. Especially among the urban poor there was a project of cultural refinement with clear parallels to the missionary facet of exported colonialism. The very fact of the proximity of these threatening others made the

civilising of the slums an urgent necessity (Thomas, 1994, chapter 5; Koundoura, 1998; Appadurai, 1996, 146 forwards). Although expressed in terms of cultural betterment, the motivation of these projects was no doubt partly the nervous recognition of groups with polemically opposed political interest not cordoned off by the comforting spread of the Atlantic or Sahara. In this respect the historical roots of 'extra-mural' education programmes are ambiguously entangled with questions of political control and concepts of evangelical improvement. Discussing in a Gorbals community centre, courtesy of Achebe's novel, the disruptive cultural and material intrusions of imperialism, it is necessary to remember that this, and other areas of Glasgow, have historically experienced a different but comparable process.⁹

While I would argue that the course I was involved with tried to invert this template, sought to encourage political awareness and militancy rather than mute it, it needs to be accepted that there is a danger that modern adult education replicates a part of that bourgeois project of refinement if it too is seeking to create subjects only in its own image. I take my defence, in the end, behind the independence of perspectives asserted in these essays and also by recognising the fact that reading these essays challenged my own normative models of textual reception. It may appear to take us some way from our direct topic, but I think it is important to dwell on this last point for a moment.

The idea of critical distance is central to the Western tradition of literary criticism in different ways. On the Left, for example, Brecht's alienation effect implies that it is the responsibility of theatre to jolt the viewer into a questioning

⁹ Such linkages leave their trace on the level of semantics. While on the one hand the production of *settler* colonies involved an explicit strategy of exporting some part of this threatening urban mass, the term *settlement* also had a Victorian denotation directly linked to this concurrent and internal imperial action: 'An establishment in the poorer quarters of a large city where educated men and women live in daily personal contact with the working class for co-operation for social reform.' (*OED*, 1961, 561) The parallel is drawn out again in the linked titles of two books published in 1890: H. M. Stanley's

perspective, to fracture the comfortable relationship of consumption that the theatregoer enjoys.

The efforts in question [Brecht is referring, admiringly, to the ‘A-effect’ in Chinese theatre] were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on the conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious[.]’ (1988, 66-7)

This relates to various Marxist theories of the ideological role of fiction in which reading, especially where the reader interacts uncritically with the text, is seen as part of the way in which exploitative social relations are reproduced and our opinions formed rather than informed.

In a more conservative literary critical usage, the reading that is made purely for entertainment or which shows itself incapable of responding in terms that reach beyond the narrative and fate of the characters is stigmatised as naïve and immature. When Nabokov calls for a ‘good reader’ (1980, 1-9) he means just this, that the pleasure of reading consists in appreciating the craft of the writer and not in sympathetic engagement with the characters. Serious, high culture, the implication runs, should not be treated at that lower level appropriate to the soap opera. On most sides of the Western tradition of literary criticism, if for different reasons, there is tacit agreement that the *correct* reader is always aware of the fictionality of the fiction and that they will couch their response, therefore, in terms that extend beyond the limits of the storyline.

Why this familiar reprise? We are aware of the reasons for the privileging of this aloof engagement from earlier discussions in this thesis. Among the essays I received were a number which were almost entirely a re-presentation of Achebe’s story. Indeed, a substantial proportion of the others included long sections in the same

vein. These were not essays that performed a close textual analysis, their deep involvement with the narrative was not made in order to take the book apart from the inside. They simply repeated the plot, sometimes without any direct interjections or reactions on the part of the essayist. One piece, for example, began:

R: Okonkwo was well known in the nine villages A young man of eighteen he had Brought honour to his village. [...] He walked heels hardly touching the ground he walked with a spring as if he was going to pounce on someone [...] Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand[.]

(Female, 36-50, care worker, M: care worker, F: farmer).

This is the opening of the novel itself, abbreviated but more or less verbatim. The essay continued to re-iterate the story in similar style. What was being demonstrated here, in other words, was an apparent lack of critical distance. I was on the edge of dismissing these essays on just this charge and concentrating on those that offered a more detached response. What challenged me, however, was a reported interview with Amos Tutuola (in Booth, 1981, 66-73), a writer who even more explicitly than Achebe works out of the tradition of oral folk-tale.¹⁰ In response to a question about the origins of his storytelling, Tutuola referred to an old woman in his village whose tales he had grown up with and towards whom he felt a competitive drive. He explained that his stories were never original acts of imagination but rather reproductions of, in Albert Lord's terminology, pre-existent formulae and themes. 'I don't forge stories. I only reproduce them.' (73) Reproduced them and, Tutuola implied, improved upon them in that act of reproduction.

It is, finally, testament to the degree to which an essentially judgmental and detached paradigm of reading response was engrained on my behalf, that I did not spot this irony initially. Here were responses to a novel, itself closely entangled with oral storytelling, that approximate to the oral model of competitive or critical

representation of an original narrative as described by Tutuola and theorists of oral literature.¹¹ The apparent absence of a critical personality in an essay that reprises the plot of *Things Fall Apart* clearly cannot mean the *actual* absence of critical choices in that re-telling. Rehearsing the story may represent a lack of critical distance but clearly not of critical thought. This is not to wholly discount the effects of ideology or of hegemony. Some of these re-plottings of the story were made to very conservative effect, including a couple that altered the narrative to emphasise the impossibly contradictory position that colonialism forced, not on Okonkwo and the villagers of Umuofia, but rather on Christian missionaries. An independence of reaction to the novel in the context of tutorials does not necessarily indicate independence from broader conservative understandings of history or the politics of imperialism, as the first two examples provided above demonstrate. Nevertheless, rejecting the idea of critical distance as the sine qua non of legitimate reading in this way does allow a respect for the agency of individual readers and their ability to offer personal responses within the limits of the cultural capital they have available to them. That is to say, without a reliance on the meta-language of critical theory.

The following are two examples of what I mean by this process. I have used the term 're-plotting' and it is intended in a double sense, in terms of the narrative of course, but also with an architectural connotation. That is to say, in each re-plotting of the story, new points of emphasis are constructed and the constellation of the whole narrative altered, skewed or formulated in a changed fashion. Here is a brief excerpt from one essay in which the essayist in recounting the tale of Okonkwo's daughter:

¹⁰ See also, by way of comparison, Emecheta's *Head Above Water* which the author prefaces with a prior telling of her life by another story-teller (1986, 6-11). Something like the same affectionate but competitive dynamic is at work.

¹¹ See, for example, Ong (1986, 147-169) and Foley's own introduction to that volume. The focus on the constitutive nature of the act of reception has been of recent interest in debates over Africa popular culture particularly in the wake of Barber's ground-breaking essay on 'Popular Arts in Africa' (1987).

R: He [Okonkwo] wished Ezinma had been a boy, he felt she would have made a far more satisfactory son. [...] The only powerful female we encounter is Chielo the high priestess to Agbala the oracle. Interesting that she chooses to take Ezinma to the cave with no-one knowing the reason. *Would she in time have become the next 'chielo'?* (Female, 36-50, various semi-skilled service sector jobs (hairdressing etc.), M: nurse, F: racing driver).

Speculation over what might have happened to the characters had the narrative been a different narrative is anathema to traditional literary criticism. But I would argue that here, it serves to emphasise the fact that Achebe's female figures are denied any important role in the novel despite their strong presence in the opening sections. In other words, that hesitant re-plotting of 'what might have been' is critique in itself, an attack on the occlusion of the women characters, a re-telling that throws their disappearance into stark relief. Another reader makes a very similar re-reading when, with the same kind of extra-fictional speculation she places Ezinma, beyond the bounds of the narrative, as the possible perpetuator of Okonkwo's resistance:

R: But, then, maybe Okonkwo's daughter, Ezinma, who had remained with him to the end, and who he always wished had been born a son, maybe, she would perpetuate the memory of the proud African warrior, who tried to defend his customs and culture, Okonkwo. (Female, 51-65, ex-telephonist, M: housekeeper, F: spot welder).

Nor are these isolated examples. A number of essays used the figures of Ezinma and Ekwefi as lode-stars from which to navigate a less masculine re-plotting of the novel. In this respect, the moment when Ezinma is taken to the cave by Chielo becomes completely pivotal, not because it is emotive in itself, but because it marks the vanishing point of both mother and daughter as effective characters. This reader makes the connection very powerfully:

R: When she [Ezinma] disappears into the caves with Agbala, we were not told what had taken place. She just seemed to do domestic duties from that point. (Female, 51-65, 'worked in a bank', M: housewife, F: engineer).

A third reader brought this moment into constellation with two others. On the one hand, a non-moment, the absence of any notable mother figure in the relation of Okonkwo's past, and on the other, the night after the egwugwu has been unmasked:

R: Achebe starts when Okonkwo was 18 years old, no mention of any devoted mother nurturing him before this [...] [W]hen Chielo the priestess of Agbala came to take their precious daughter Ezinma away in the middle of the night [...] This was the only infant to survive from ten children and you can comprehend the mothers instinct to protect the child [...] [A]fter Enoch killed an ancestral spirit ‘That night the Mother of the Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son[.]’

(Female, 51-65, florist, M: not given, F: farmer).

These occasional and limited recognitions of a mother-child relationship are picked loose from the novel by this reader in distinct contrast to what she elsewhere describes: the sanction of fear that plays such a primary role in determining Okonkwo’s actions. There is in this re-plotting, it seems to me, a quite conscious critique of a patriarchal dynamic in which social being can be read only through ‘solid personal achievements’ and the patrolled indexes of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in activities socially coded as masculine. In this respect it is a re-plotting that is both consonant with the themes of Achebe’s novel, but also articulating an absence within it.

The second example of a re-plotting that I want to offer here was a more individual one:

R: Okonkwo’s exile is sad, especially as it is for such a long time, and when he returns, the life he has known, and has been longing to return to, no longer exists. One wonders, if he had been better off, to stay with his mother’s people, and keep his illusions. He was uprooted once and now feels a stranger among his own tribe. *From then on the story is rapidly downhill all the way, until the disastrous ending[.]*

(Female, over 65, ex-housewife and voluntary worker, M: not given, F: vet).

The usual response to *Things Fall Apart* is to read it either as a tragedy of colonial arrogance or as a tragedy of Okonkwo’s hubris in the classical sense. All of that is ellipsed and indeed sidelined in the last sentence and instead the story is redrawn as a tragedy of exile and return. There is the clear causal link implied by ‘From then on...’ and again there is that (traditionally disallowed) speculative element: might all this have been avoided if Okonkwo had not insisted on repatriating himself? Without wanting to be simplistic about it, some sociological explanation of this reading is suggested in the fact that the essayist was forced to leave Germany in the late 1930’s

due to the rise of the Nazi party. Carlo Ginzburg has given account of the grids through which a reader might engage with a text, filtering out specific strands of meaning from the polysemic possibilities of narrative (1980, 33). This is very much the process revealed here. It is this lesson that has fed most directly into my thesis regarding distanced positions and the holding of high levels of cultural capital. In this respect, although there may be queries about the methodological purity of the evidence gathered here, it is worth remembering Raymond Williams' (1989, 151-176) short historical note: it was in the productively open, unstructured space of extramural education that the most useful and original insights of what was to become 'cultural studies' were first made, and it was within the institutionally closed, disciplinarily structured space of the academy that much of this was lost.

'Imaginative geography'.

As a way in which to approach the body of these essays as a whole, with the idea of 'migrant fiction' particularly in mind, I want to return to a concept of Edward Said's. The second theoretical chapter of this thesis includes a discussion of Said and some of the complications that have been recognised in his work, particularly *Orientalism*. To briefly repeat: Said gives the name 'Orientalism' to a Western cultural discourse, largely academic but also including fiction such as Kipling's *Kim*, which did not simply abet the actions of colonialism but was, in fact, fundamental to its operation. Said argues that works in the orientalist tradition, whether purported as fact or fiction, wrote about the orient and indeed created the concept of the orient with no real relationship to what they were putatively describing. In so doing they provided potential European imperialists with an 'imaginative geography' (1991, 71 forwards)

which, *read as if real*, gave them the confidence to act out a material repression of the area as well as a discursive defence for their actions in the face of any domestic criticism.

Leaving aside the problems with this theory, to which I have referred previously, it is worth recognising Said's exaggerated opinion of the practical interventions of fiction or of fiction-presented-as-fact. He goes as far as to make a direct causal link between the Egypt campaign of 1798 and Napoleon's prior reading of Orientalist works which gave him a false-but-instrumental 'textual knowledge' of the place and presumably therefore the confidence to invade (Said, 1991, 73-94; 92-95). There are moments in this founding text when it appears that Said is inverting a reductive materialism, almost to the extent of producing a model in which the imaginative fully determines historical outcomes. It will be immediately apparent how closely this aggrandisement of the social force of the imagination relates to more recent assertions of the same, as discussed in the previous chapter and related to the thesis of critics such as Arjun Appadurai.¹²

Nevertheless, what seems less commented on is that Said in *Orientalism* is also implying a kind of theory of reception, at least in relation to the Western receiver of texts about 'the elsewhere.' These readers, in his work, appear to have read narratives about 'other' places through a kind of will to power, or with an urge to domination of that which is presented there. It is in *Orientalism* that his debt to

¹² Seen in its breadth, as I have already argued, Said's work certainly implies a more dialectical relationship between the real and the representational. Indeed, as Lazarus has suggested (1993, 90-93; more fully in 1999a, chapter 2) there has been an appropriative logic at work in the installation of Said as founder of the field, so that the somewhat unrepresentative *Orientalism* is taken to license 'anti-metanarrative' positions that hardly sit well with his own commitment to - for example - a representation of Palestinian nationalist aspirations. Reading Said's 1993 Reith lectures, his willingness to use terms like 'universal principles' and to speak without qualification about binary oppositions is striking. Such terminology sounds dissonant in the context of postcolonial theory's largely deconstructive orientation. 'The intellectual [represents the socially excluded] on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning

Foucault is most pronounced and this equation of knowledge with power perhaps expresses that. Here, of course, is where these essays come in because we are dealing with a shifted process. If orientalist fiction is implicated in the actions and attitudes of colonialism, what kind of alterations of attitude could be effected by interaction with a novel that consciously reverses the colonialist perspective?

One reaction occurred in enough essays for it to seem significant here. It was a kind of paradox that readers struggled with: on the one hand there was a sense of disruption, of confusion, of finding themselves within an imaginative world with which they were unfamiliar. As a reader already cited revealingly put it:

[A] life, so far removed from us, that it seems far removed from reality[.]
(Female, over 65, ex-housewife and voluntary worker, M: not given, F: vet).

Very few of the responses did not mention this sense of dislocation. Unheimlich (unhomely) is how Bhabha, for his part, titles it courtesy of Freud, in his discussion of why world literature is worth studying.¹³ On the other hand, and the duality haunted many of the essays, there was the sympathetic sense of location that fiction engenders. The responses expressed this in different ways, often as an epiphany of recognition in which something that had seemed initially unfamiliar, the court of the masked spirits for example, the egwugwu, suddenly ‘seems similar to our own justice system.’ Others talked about recognising character types, human failings, or simply a developing sense of locality. Postcolonial theory quite rightly teaches Western academics to be wary of that anthropological model of ‘knowing’ in which the social formations of another place are reduced to our own normative typologies.¹⁴ Indeed,

freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations[.] [...] ideally the intellectual represents emancipation and enlightenment[.]’ (Said, 1994, 9, 84).

¹³ See the eponymous essay in *The Location of Culture*, 1994, esp. 9-18. See also, for a related discussion of the term, Kristeva, 1991, chapter 8.

¹⁴ A case in point, for example, would be Ruth Finnegan’s encyclopaedic *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970) which, for all its path-breaking breadth of research still falls back on such classic western categories as the elegy, the lyric and (she describes this last as being absent from African oral literature) the epic. Okpewho’s *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of Oral Performance* (1979)

long before postcolonial theory as a sub-field ever began, Achebe himself, and other African writers, were making the same point. It does not seem to me, however, that anything like the same power differentials are structuring the responses when these readers talk about recognising the “social welfare” program at work within and between the villages’, or when they liken the sale of produce in Umuofia to a ‘Super Market principle’, or the feast of the new yam to ‘harvest thanksgiving’. Whether or not these are apposite figures for what Achebe is describing, we need to remember that not all British readers read from the same social position. In this respect it seems to me that the majority of these responses should be taken in good faith, as attempts to translate unfamiliar material into relevant local experience, rather than as evidence of a typically Eurocentric universalisation of values. As is argued previously, we need to take account of the social *position* of reading. When an essayist concludes ‘We identify with this’, having begun ‘It was difficult to read the first part of Achebe’s novel. [P]laces and characters were so strange’, it may be that we need to put our deconstructive suspicion of such statements on hold.

Throughout this thesis I have been at pains to criticise what I have described as the fetishisation of the imaginary, the wholesale aggrandisement of the work of the imagination. As Marx’s often very figurative aesthetic suggests, however, literary writing can alter our perception of the world. It is in this chapter therefore, that I am afforded the opportunity to broach the question of imaginative products and their effects. It could be argued that this sense of dislocation followed by relocation, typical of the reception of *Things Fall Apart* here, is representative of the action of fiction as

provides both a challenge to that specific claim, but also a re-instatement of what is distinctive about oral performance, what is resistant to easy translation into western categories. Griswold’s (2000) equally taxonomic classification of the Nigerian novel into eight distinct ‘types’ seems to me, for all its thoroughness, to raise the same difficult questions about a western desire to categorise. This is especially the case in the uncomfortable context of such research as Appadurai’s on the colonial bureaucracy’s enumerative, taxonomic projects (1996, 114-135).

such. Oestraniemie is what the formalists called it: defamiliarisation (see Lemon and Reis, 1965). This however, does not seem a sufficient account to me, and it is for this reason that I have made a perhaps surprising return to Said and his term (which is not unproblematic) ‘textual’ or ‘imaginative’ knowledge. The value of this idea lies in its specificity, its attempt to describe the determinate historical engagement between certain readers and certain texts. It is out of the relationship between the site of production of this fiction on the one hand and the site of its reception by external readers on the other that a contradictory sense of sympathy with the unfamiliar is given potential existence. To say this is to take up Said’s own suggestion that we might ‘re-consider’ orientalism, in the context of historical challenges to Western representations of the world, through a ‘wider and libertarian optic[.]’ (Said, 1997, 129) This displacing, replacing action of migrant fiction may be the positive side of the production of knowledge that he is referring to.

It is possible to say the same thing in other ways. Benedict Anderson, for example, famously suggests that the novel helped form part of the imagined community of emergent nations, offering a fictional tour of the borders of that act of cultural imagination:

Fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality; creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of the modern nation. (Anderson, 1991, 36)

‘Migrant writing’, which I am using *in this context* to refer to the relation between the point of production of the story and the location of the reader, by placing the reader within the circumference of someone else’s imagined community, suggests that fiction might sometimes broaden as much as limit vision. The following are two quotations, from a number that might have been chosen:

R: *Things Fall Apart* is not a book I would have read, had it not been selected for me. [...] I have to admit, however, that I have read the complete book twice and re-read several sections. Why read it twice? Because all except one year [...] my entire

Primary and Secondary School history education dealt with World and Political History, leaving me certain preconceptions particularly regarding colonialism. Once subscribing to the definition of colonialism as: 'A policy of acquiring or maintaining colonies' and being a loyal citizen of the world's greatest colonial power I naturally believed it to be for the greater good of those being colonised. I am now given towards the more derogatory definition: 'Economic exploitation of weak or backward peoples by a larger power.' Even though the latter has proved to be the more honest of the two definitions [...] it still arrogantly supposes the subjects to be weak or backward by comparison.

(Male, 36-50, security officer, M: housewife, F: 'haulage and motor trades').

R2: I am sorry to say I can't explain myself better than to say my eyes have been opened. If I had known before what power the meaning of words [has] I would have enjoyed a hundred times more the books I have read previously. I would also of learnt about different customs, religions and traditions instead of skimming over them, thinking them to be fillings and little in-betweens the real story.¹⁵

(Female, 21-35, nurse, M: cleaner, F: labourer).

It might seem unnecessary to make this caveat again, but I want to insist that this is not an argument that migrant fiction represents the early emergence of a transnational, universalising culture such as is the implication of terms like 'hybridity' and 'migrancy' in their recent critical employment. The question of representations and reality, of the mediation of our experiences in language, of the 'texting' of the world is a fraught one and in many ways beyond the scope of this thesis. What is crucial to recognise, however, is the lesson suggested by so many of the theorists previously cited, which is this: a wholly de-materialised model of culture serves an ideological purpose to the extent that it camouflages the on-going and indeed increasing differentials of wealth globally beneath a suggestion of free cultural plurality which is suspiciously similar to the neo-classical 'pure dream' of an unfettered market.

My point here is that we cannot disavow the degree to which writing *retains* the stubborn traces of its site of production, culturally and politically. In many respects these traces are what enable it to defamiliarise the foreign reader and present an alternative angle of view. When a reader in the Fife group described her experience of the book as being like 'sitting in on someone else telling to someone else' we can

¹⁵ I am aware of the possibility in this second example, that something of that putative 'right answer' might be being sought in this response. Nevertheless, it may possible to bear this inflection in mind

hear an echo of what Sartre wrote, for the European reader, of Fanon: 'he speaks of you often, never to you' (Sartre, 1967, 9). Although this latter quote could be applied to Achebe only very problematically, the crucial question here is not simply 'who', but 'where'. The site of fictional production, the locality, the nation, the community, the class and history from within which it is made: all these surroundings impinge upon the production of the cultural item and leave their marks. These are the traces that migrant fiction carries and which disrupt the engagement of the non-local reader. In short, a recuperation of Said's concept of imaginative knowledge in a positive sense would have to recognise that the moment of imaginative production is concurrent with all kinds of histories and struggles which take place in lived life and which scar the production. Against the culturalist implication which is sometimes strong in Said's writing, we need to insist on the dialectical relationship between the real and representational as the reason why cultural products can achieve any effect in the world outside their fictionality.

Discussing this in the past I have met with the following objection: the reason for the disorientation of the reader in the opening sections of Achebe's fiction, it is posited, is that it is within these early chapters that Achebe works most closely with the oral tradition, allowing the narrative to skip between characters, and between time frames. It is only in the latter stages of the book that the linear drive of the novel, more traditional in the European sense, asserts itself. This disruption of the unfamiliar, in other words, can be explained wholly on the level of formal experimentation, unrelated to the encounter with culturally and historically different perspectives. One could, by implication, substitute a James Kelman novel for Achebe and disclose the same responses.

without acceding to the cynical opinion that this is simply a statement made by rote, or formulated solely to catch the ear of the tutor.

The divide, of course, is a wholly false one and this repeats the point. Achebe's use of the oral template derives from a specific, determinate history. That he wrote a book with traces of the oral tradition is a fact related to the politics of literary production, to the site of his writing, and to the motivations of a cultural nationalism prevalent at the time. Form is not something divorced from this ground of fictional production. Achebe has always been clear about this in his critical writing (1975, chapters 2, 5; 1988, chapters 5, 13) and to be thrown by his formal strangeness is a result of something that is, paradoxically, more than just a matter of form.

A brief addendum to this section. Gramsci, in comments already discussed, despairs of the fact that the most popular fictions among the Italian youth are American pulp thrillers (Gramsci, 1985, e.g. 255 forwards). It is, he says, an index of the degree to which Italy has failed to develop a coherent national culture and of the extent to which it has fallen under the sway of a powerful American cultural hegemony. As I have suggested with Said's term 'imaginative knowledge', this aside from Gramsci also has its positive converse. Sometimes, perhaps, the imaginative knowledge from someone else's narrative tradition might offer a first fracture-point to the hold of our own local hegemonies. In the case of the first citation above¹⁶ from a night security guard who read the book on duty, for example, Achebe's novel disrupted a traditional view of British colonial history, inherited from school, which still insisted on valorising the imperial project. Brecht's alienation effect, in case we forget, was not in the final instance about encouraging habits of better reading, better consumption in relation to theatrical performance, but about encouraging a more critical reading in relation to lived life and the explanations of history and reality that the audience met both inside and outside of the theatre. These essays may not have

¹⁶ i.e. the one beginning: 'Things Fall Apart is not a book I would have read...'

demonstrated a critical distance in the conventional sense, but it is a not insignificant thing to find the kind of critical distance towards hegemonic history that is suggested in this final example:

R: As a white European, my overwhelming feeling on finishing this book was sympathy for Achebe, the Igbo people and their tribal neighbours. Disgust at the arrogance of the colonials and anger at their treatment of anyone who was not willing to agree with their ideas. I felt admiration for Chinua Achebe in writing this story, particularly in English, so no European could fail to understand how betrayed he felt. (Female, 36-50, various skilled and semi-skilled service sector jobs (hairdressing, barwork etc.), M: nurse, F: racing driver).

Reader responses and homologies of position.

R: His book [...] will I believe alter our perceptions of the colonial history of the dark continent.
(Male, 51-65(?), ex-merchant navy, parent's occupations: not given).

Migrant fiction, I have argued, offers a contradictory sense of dislocation and sympathetic location. Encountering Achebe's novel for the first time involves a certain necessary violence to the reader's preconceptions of history and of place. This ambiguous gift comes without resolution and in this respect migrant fiction does not determine how it is received. It threatens, at best, a paradox or a fracture that has to be faced. For those few readers in the groups who were conspicuous in having had well-established careers and in considering themselves middle-class, the resolution of this contradiction clearly involved a very fraught negotiation. In more than one case it took the form of a recuperation. The quote above is revealing in that it reinscribes prior opinions of the 'dark continent', even amid the rhetoric of new perspectives. In the generally sympathetic, but middle-class context of the reading group run in Fife, therefore, a statement such as 'it [the novel] just shows that we were civilised just a little before them' is typical in that it is careful to highlight the pastness of this apparent differential between Europe and Africa but leaves the key index ('civilised') and its related statement of priority ('just a little before') unexamined. The same kind

of response is visible in this quotation from a respondent with a similar social background to that of the essayist cited above, in which this same manoeuvre of simultaneous alteration and recuperation is made:

R: [B]efore I read it I had not much knowledge of, nor concern for the way we, the British, achieved, our overseas Empire. I am not saying it was an era of total oppression, but it was not totally benign either. [...] There is an ambiguity about my feelings concerning the benefits to the recipients, and in fairness I feel more good has resulted from our involvement than evil.
(Male, 51-65, naval captain, M: housewife, F: 'sailor').

This is not to posit homogenous, uniform class responses. However, if we are to account for various receptions of the text, we should be aware of something of the *position* of view that conditions a specific reading. In the example just given, that means a comfortably retired officer from the merchant navy. In the following, more dismissive response, it is a reader from an aristocratic background who had spent time in Rhodesia during her youth:

R: [W]hy read it? Indeed I ask myself why. It tells the story of the effect of European laws and ways on an African tribe from Nigeria. When I first opened the book I misread the quotation from W.B. Yeats as 'The Falconer cannot bear instead of the Falconer cannot hear. I think this line sums up the whole story and indeed sums up the whole book. Indeed why read it? [...] Who is the story written for? Heaven only knows! I don't. [...] Whose story gets lost [in Achebe's novel]? Answer. Everyone's.
(Female, over 65, retired doctor (?), F: colonial service).

There could hardly be a clearer example of the ideological creation of history in which a particular position of view, in racial and class terms, is capitalised and expanded into History as such. To make the incredible claim that there is no story told in *Things Fall Apart* is, I would suggest, more than just an angry conservative reaction to its portrayal of colonialism. It means quite literally what it says: the story that is presented here does not, ideologically speaking, exist.

On the other hand, there was a notable consensus among those whose work had been or was in short-term, unstable menial jobs and in (paid and unpaid) domestic work. The majority of this group very clearly aligned themselves sympathetically with Umuofia and even with Okonkwo's final actions, so that a number concluded their

essays with statements to that effect. These contrasted to the examples above precisely in their lack of qualification:

R: The rest of the world knew nothing about the Africans side of the story. I think on the whole this book as made me look at things differently, it was moving. The way not just Okonkwo but other characters suffered and no one was really portrayed as perfect. But I still felt for them when things started to fall apart.
(Female, 21-35, shop assistant, M: housewife, F: not given).

More interestingly, however, it was also from readers with this social background that the most original, and often self-interrogating responses came. Apart from those pieces cited earlier, it is worth mentioning in detail one essay that produced a startlingly new reading of the novel's dénouement. As suggested, the traditional understanding of Okonkwo's suicide is to see it either in pseudo-Durkheimian terms, as the act of a desperate man facing social dissolution and the sudden uncertainty of everything he held to be concrete or as the act of the tragic protagonist whose flaw was to challenge his own *chi*.¹⁷ This particular essay however, subtly re-plotted the ending to retrieve Okonkwo's death as heroic self-sacrifice made in order to avert the threat of colonial retribution against the village.

R: Perhaps Okonkwo was not rash when he killed the messenger, but the other messengers were allowed to escape. It may have been better for the clan for this to happen as we know of [...] the suffering already experienced by the leaders of Umuofia, and that Abame had been obliterated. By taking his own life Okonkwo saved his people from this. [...] he knew what a suicide entailed, this for him would have been the ultimate sacrifice, knowing what his burial would have been like. We are told that 'the story of Ikemefuna is still told in Umuofia unto this day' and so the clan continues. Perhaps Okonkwo's sacrifice was not in vain[.]
(Female, over 65, retired 'wage clerkess', M: not given, F: shoemaker).

From three scattered fragments in the novel (the story of the colonial regime's revenge against Abame after a white man is killed there, a brief line implying the continuity of the village, and the concluding suicide) the essayist produces a new understanding of Okonkwo's final action as something both calculated and heroic. We do no justice at all to the agency of readers if we underplay the hegemonic pressures

that impel one reading over another, or ignore such readily available responses as are inscribed in common-sense understandings of the world. This last reading is produced against all of the more traditional perspectives offered in tutorials, against the grain of our taught national histories and against the still on-going mass cultural portrayal of Africa as primitive. This is not just a piece of determined independent reading, it is an independent reading fired by sympathy with Okonkwo's position and requiring genuine work from the essayist in order to produce it.

It would be easy to make this a reductive argument in which the reception of migrant fiction by each reader, the resolution of this paradox of dislocation and sympathetic location, finds its explanatory key in a formula of social background. For what is perhaps a more flexible way of accounting for this I turn once again to Pierre Bourdieu and to a parallel in his work. Or, rather, to a theory of *parallels* in his work. Bourdieu describes the situation of the avant-garde artist as being that of the economically dominated in the field of cultural production. There is, therefore, he says, an equivalence between their position and that of the economically dominated in the wider field of power. Thus he accounts for what might otherwise seem a puzzling fact, the similar intention of the strategies shared by radical artists and the political radicals in the working classes. The correspondence emerges from their *homology* of position. Although they occupy different social fields, they have a similar sense of domination and a shared desire to disrupt the status quo (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993, 44-5, 57, 87-97).¹⁸

¹⁷ See, for example, Biodun Jeyifo's brilliant essay 'The Resilience and Predicament of Obierika' (1990, 51-70), and Benedict Ibitokun's judgement: 'I find Okonkwo's suicide escapist and gratuitous [...] True heroes are those who stay behind to face the realities of the time.' (1991, 419)

¹⁸ 'Alternative and oppositional artistic groups were defensive attempts to get beyond the market, distantly analogous to the working-class development of collective bargaining [...] There could thus be at least a negative identification between the exploited worker and the exploited artist.' (Williams, 1989, 54)

It may be arguable that something similar is revealed between the West of Scotland and the East of Nigeria. Readers who occupy various positions of social exclusion seem to read Achebe's novel with greater openness and to be less willing to simply re-instate their prior understandings. Reference is made to 'our national history', but not everyone has the same sense of investment in the concept of that history. It was, after all, part of the implicit project of that internal imperialism referred to earlier that it would teach those in areas very much like Govan or the outlying estates of Dumfries to respect and take pride in a story of national achievement and to emphasise the degree to which it was a shared value, to highlight the word 'our'. A glorious and coherent history not to be threatened by current disquiets. The ideological creation of what Anderson called unisonance remains an on-going project. But this inculcated idea of a common culture or common past can only paper over so many cracks in the social wall. The encounter with migrant fiction gives rise to the offer, across the lines of national hegemonies and imagined communities, of a recognition of shared exclusions and alienations as well as a counter-history:

R: This book is history. It tells not of the white man being the saviour of some primitive man of the black man and how he felt being overruled by men who lied, and cheated and inflicted unjust punishment.¹⁹

There is, I would suggest, a homology between the social position of some of these readers in their local fields of power and that of indigenous peoples within the colonial field of power that explains something of the resilience and sympathy with which they read Achebe's novel.

It is necessary once again to add a couple of caveats to this analysis. The first is that I use the phrase 'national history' to refer to *British* national history. Teaching

¹⁹ These are the concluding words of the essay from a 'housewife' and recuperating drug user (21-35). I do not have further details on parental and personal background.

the course in Dumfries I was following on from a series of tutorials on Scottish history which led to a number of voluntary parallels being proffered between, for example, the extraction of mineral resources from the Nigerian delta and the use of the North Sea's oil reserves. In one case it was certainly through the lens of the popular revival of Scottish national sentiment that Achebe's novel was read:

R: I think a parallel could be drawn with this book to the 1800's in Scotland. It was the age of enlightenment and we were a nation betrayed. [...] Scotland wasn't an intellectual desert that many people thought...
(Female, 51-65, office secretary, M: housewife, F: baker).

This was the only essay, however, to explicitly make this connection. Although this specific homology of situation may have structured a number of responses I do not have any further evidence which suggests this was the case.

Secondly, and this has been broached above, we should recall again Macherey's point that fiction communicates in silences as well as words. The one valency that cross-cut a sympathy with Okonkwo was that expressed for the largely under-presented women of the novel. In this respect another homology, based on a shared recognition of gendered repression, was apparent in a number of essays licensing understandings such as the following:

R: You never read about the females as they were invisible in those days in some parts of the world they are still invisible. They worked the harder and were appreciated the least.

(Female, 51-65, further information not given).

R2: Women the world over have been subjugated by men since time immemorial in every culture. [...] Women have always had the hard back-breaking work, seen only as receptacles for progeny[.]

(Female, 51-65, office secretary, M: housewife, F: baker).

R3: Like most men living anywhere in the world at that particular time in history, and, dare I say, in some situations today, he seemed abusive and dominant.

(Female, 51-65, ex-telephonist, M: housekeeper, F: spot welder).

Evidence of this homology of feeling is available in comparing these comments (and those offered earlier) with one made by a young Nigerian woman in a reading group held in Jos, examined in the next chapter. The similarity in terms of the argument is striking:

R: I think Chinua Achebe did not give any regard to women. He treated women, he was gender biased, he looked at women as an inferior gender that were not supposed to be even heard in the sight (?). And I feel because of the way he even talked of Okonkwo, the way Okonkwo treated his wives, they were not even mentioned. An example is the virgin that was brought from the other, from the neighbouring village, she was not even mentioned in the book, they just, he just forgot about her[.]

This frustration with Achebe's portrayal obviously moderated the way in which Okonkwo as a character was approached, but it did not, by and large, alter the readers' alignment with the villagers of Umuofia in general or with what was taken to be Achebe's project of historical correction.

Conclusion.

This chapter is intended to provide material that is usefully comparative with that which both precedes and follows it. For example, in trying to develop in the second section an account of readings which 're-plot' the novel, I hope to have reiterated at a different level one of the central points of the thesis, which is the fact that claims of distinction are typically couched in a dual rhetoric of distance and vision. In this case, the example is the rhetoric of critical distance which licenses legitimate literary readings. Obviously an unquestioning reception of social representations is hardly likely to encourage critical reading of wider social mechanisms. Nevertheless, my point, via Bourdieu and in consonance with reception studies in the field of African popular culture, is that this affirmation of distance as a badge of legitimacy gains power by an unspoken equation made between 'sunken' acts of reading and the supposedly 'sunken' life experience of the subaltern classes in general. Behind this distinction, which I have continually argued bears on the increasing valorisation of elite migrant experience, is the cachet of ease vis-à-vis any social object and the ability to assert *distance from* as an expression of *power over* that object.

To discuss this is also to broach the question of how texts are received and how meaning is produced in that reception. This is where Marx's brief note is useful and why it initiates the chapter. In an interview given in 1977 Macherey specifically cites this aside from Marx and gives a compelling account of it. The point is, he says, something which Marx leaves unspoken: the fact that for a materialist understanding nothing of Greek art can survive the end of Greek society and its obtaining social order. Therefore, any use of Greek culture as a model or object of intention fundamentally mistakes the nature of art and how it comes to be meaningful. The tone of the note, Macherey argues, is actually ironic and the key point is that which he had sought to expound in his classic study:

Literary works are not only produced, they are constantly *reproduced* under different conditions - and so they themselves become very different. [...] Texts are constantly rewritten, their effects are constantly altered. It is essential to study this material history of texts [...] (Macherey, 1977, 6-7, italics in original).

It is exactly a series of 're-productions' of Achebe's novel which I have given account of here. At the same time, it is vital to insist on the fact that these are not free readings and that there are determinations to be reckoned with, not only in the semiotic sense of that which is licensed by the text, but also in the idea that the novel faces the reader as a kind of crisis requiring resolution. The nature of this resolution is delimited, but not simply determined, by the social position of view from which the reader carries out this literary labour of re-production.

In this respect, I have argued that one of these delimitations or tendencies is the sympathy that exists, in potential, between subaltern positions in divergent cultural fields. In the fourth chapter of this thesis I suggested that fiction by migrant writers may make certain homologies of experience apparent. By developing this theory of homologies further in the related, inverted context of reader reception, I

intend to buttress this proposition. This short note of Marx's, it seems to me, also throws light on this fact and on this action of the imaginative products of human beings.

All mythology overcomes and dominates the shapes and forces of nature in the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them. (1973, 110)

After this teleological statement, Marx lines up Vulcan against Roberts & Co., Hermes against the *Crédit Mobilier*. His point is that human kind, having effected a control over nature on the basis of rational science makes redundant the imaginative control enacted by Greek mythology. Therefore Greek art, grounded in these specific myths and more generally in an epoch that requires this mythological consciousness, cannot but appear to us the product of a time past. What is odd, however, is that this position seems to ignore Marx's own most insistent point: that capitalism, despite its exponential development of the forces of production, specifically denies control of these forces to the majority of the human species. Hermes may stand no chance against the *Crédit Mobilier*, but the subaltern classes have, as yet, control over *neither*. Indeed his continual use of occult imagery and of a gothic aesthetic to give a phenomenological account of life under capitalism seems to clearly run against his own reading of the mythological as a naïve leftover.²⁰ Notwithstanding the careful, specific account of the system's operation, there is an imaginary aspect put to work in Marx. It might, in itself, be well described as a project that: 'overcomes and dominates the shapes and forces of [capitalism] in the imagination and by the imagination; therefore vanish[ing] with the advent of real mastery over them.'

If we can take Marx's question to be 'how is that texts from other places and spaces affect us', the answer, at least for some readers in this situation, is that they are

²⁰ In the context of Marx's 'imaginative' or phenomenological account of capitalism, especially his insistent gothic aesthetic, see Carver (1998, 2-23) and Berman (1982, chapter, 2).

affective when they give witness to a struggle to ‘overcome, dominate and shape in the imagination’ which, although the details of the situation are different, is (or at least has been) familiar to them as a daily effort. What has been argued in relation to migration generally is here argued in specific relation to migrant fictions: that what they disclose is not only contingency and the heterogeneity of experience, but also the *continuity* of lines and experiences of oppression under capitalism. This is also, of course, where these receptions diverge from that given as example by Marx because *Things Fall Apart* strikes a nostalgic note, that is to say speaks of a ‘pastness’, only for those readers who are not struck by its immediacy and by the fact that, far from being a Greek text in Marx’s sense, it is live, contemporary, ‘material history’. My use of Marx here also highlights, and this is perhaps a redundant statement at this point, the fact that this ambiguous gift of ‘migrant fiction’ determines nothing. At most this feeling of location and dislocation might be described as a paradox offering a paradox, that is to say, an understanding which is counter (para) to received knowledge (doxa). Or indeed, as will be expanded upon in the final chapter, to a received knowledge which is in fact a non-knowledge, a sanctioned in-attention. Remembering this, it seems to me, is also to fight against the misrecognition of cultural capital which dissembles its final reliance on economics. Marx did not, having written the *Manifesto*, assume the foregone completion of a struggle for equality.

Chapter 7: 'Because they bring the story home.'

This final chapter is intended to provide a comparison with, and also to qualify, the discussion of the reception of *Things Fall Apart* by Scottish readers. There was an absent but constitutive figure in the previous chapter: the implied 'local' reader, the one for whom *Things Fall Apart* is *not* a work of 'migrant fiction.' In other words, those to whom Achebe refers when he talks of the African writer's 'links with his own people[.]' (1975, 5) Recent critical writing teaches us to be immediately sceptical of such ideal figures, seeing them at best as the necessary fictions of theory, irrecoverable in any sociological sense.¹ Of course, the ideal subject of Achebe's statement does not exist and short of demanding from him a delineation of his intended audience down to the specific individual we have to accept the fact that language often involves generalisation. It does not seem to me, however, that this makes it inherently false to distinguish between the local and non-local readers of a text. As with the discussion of nationalism earlier, we need also to recognise that Achebe may be politically motivated when he refers to 'his own people', and that to point out the fuzzy edges of such distinguishing statements comes a poor second to appreciating their necessity. Nor is it wholly an abstract construction. While Achebe's references to a local audience move on a sliding scale between Igbo, Nigerian and African, that is the clear limit of the extension.² The circumstantial history that might be disclosed behind the creation of these categories does not reduce the fact that they are daily employed as means by which people site themselves in relation to others and

¹ There is something of a paradox in the fact that while recent criticism might be sceptical of the transparency of Achebe's claim, literary fiction seems to be regularly and easily accepted as a source of acceptable 'emic' data (as Schipper specifically argues it to be (1993, 39-48)), often in lieu of any more structured or deliberate sociological research.

² Hence, for example, his statement: 'I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units - in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa.' (1975, 56)

understand their existence. It is important to remember in this context that Achebe continually refuted the demand that African fiction have a 'universal' address.

This is what this chapter studies. Just as Achebe lays claim to a certain audience, so there is a readership for his novels which validate his words by a reciprocal claim: i.e. the reception of his writing as being 'ours.' The first section of the chapter, therefore, looks at the way in which a narrative can act as a locus for identity, a part of the cultural staking out of that which is within 'our' provenance. If it is important to insist, as the previous chapter has, that we recognise the divisions that cross-cut a British body of readership, it is also important to recognise those that draw across Nigerian readers. The second section of the chapter, therefore, looks at the way in which non-Igbo readers justify their claim to cultural ownership of Achebe's work. As I hope is clear, I do not want this to read as an argument that sees only a mass of heterogeneous readings without any kind of correspondence at a group level. My experience of readers' own receptions in this context is that people have few qualms about totalising, about considering themselves as part of a wider society, and that there is a necessity in their doing so. 'One may forget about totality' as Canclini has said, 'when one is interested only in the differences among people, not when one is concerned with inequality.' (1985, 11)

Nevertheless, as soon as a text is demarcated as 'ours', the possessive nature of the claim raises the possibility of its becoming a means of distinction from those less well placed to make that claim. *Things Fall Apart*, as a canonical Nigerian novel, may be the putative cultural possession of any Nigerian but this obviously means very different things to the young undergraduate on the one hand, the semi-literate market trader on the other. It is as a partial recognition of the question of cultural hierarchy

See also Niyi Osundare's very similar description of his audience as comprising Nigerians then Africans and then the rest of the developing world (in interview with Birbalsingh, 1988, 95).

therefore that I look briefly in the third section at the non-readership of highbrow African fiction and also at the dominance of Anglo-American pulp thrillers. Finally, there is an examination of the reading of a Scottish novel by Nigerian readers. It attempts to show how an unequal historical exchange shapes the nature of this encounter.

Apart from the research already referred to, this chapter draws on material from two reading groups that were run in Jos during the summer of 1999. The first involved a number of young people from various educational and working backgrounds and studied their responses to *Things Fall Apart*. The second used Iain Crichton Smith's *Consider the Lilies* and the engagement with the text among a group of rather more educated African readers: academics, postgraduates and white collar workers. Additional material is taken from an extended discussion of *Things Fall Apart* held with a group of second year Sociology students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. All three meetings were taped and the transcripts are cited here.

Local readers.

What distinguishes the engagement of Nigerian readers with *Things Fall Apart*, from that of British readers, is not just a greater familiarity with the cultural practice referenced by Achebe. This in itself is related to, but only a part of, a more elusive investment of the novel with a sense that it is *theirs*, a piece of what Canclini calls the patrimony, that which is putatively held in common. This is necessarily an elusive relationship and not easily disclosed. In interviews, or indeed in questionnaires, it is possible to pose direct queries about the respondent's sense that particular texts are part of that which 'belongs', but such linear approaches to a felt relationship tend to

receive superficial answers. Given Anderson's thesis about the way in which the novel, and indeed the wider forms of print-capitalism³, 'fuse' (1991, 30) an inner world of fiction with an outer social world it may be better to come at this welding from a more oblique angle. There is, after all, something confusingly reversible about the idea of *belonging* here, both the sense that a subject has a stake in a particular cultural production - that in some way it belongs *to them* - but also that, as part of the national culture, they belong *to it*. It is both possession (that which is owned) and possession (that which immanently inhabits).

The reception of authors such as Achebe and Soyinka, manoeuvred into the patrimony through their adoption in state education is,⁴ at one level and in confirmation of Anderson's thesis, clearly entangled with the perceived national status of Nigeria.⁵ Hence, answering a question about the importance of the tradition of novelists like Achebe, respondents gave replies such as:

³ For an eloquent examination of the rise of the bourgeois press in Nigeria see 'The crisis of cultural relevance: The case of the capitalist press and Nigerian society' (Ayu, 1997, 141-168).

⁴ 'Well, for those who those that are incorporated into the school curriculum [i.e. especially Achebe and Soyinka] then all students, all educated Nigerians will be familiar (?) with them. Those who studied in Nigeria would have passed through ... so those who studied their first education and secondary school in Nigeria would have gone through one or two [of these novels.]' This is a quote from an interviewee in Glasgow.

(Male, 21-35, Banker, M: trader, F: hotelier)

⁵ The familiarity of these writers, both by virtue of their place in literature courses and, especially in the case of Soyinka, as active intervener in the political arena, does mean that they are very broadly recognised, at least in comparison with other Nigerian writers. This is borne out in the table below, which records the familiarity of respondents with the names of a number of Nigerian authors.

Table 3	Wole Soyinka	Chinua Achebe	Ben Okri	Buchi Emecheta	Amos Tutuola	Festus Iyayi
Nigerian respondents resident in...						
Nigeria (%)	96	91	37	30	26	23
UK (%)	91	91	64	36	36	32
Total (%)	94	91	44	31	29	25

R: It makes the outside world respect and value Nigeria as a nation.

(Male, 36-50, electrician, M: petty farmer, F: farmer and tapper).

R2: We need these people to act as the conscience of the nation.

(Male, 36-50, doctor, M: housewife, F: surgeon).

R3: It elevates Nigeria as a nation.

(Male, 36-50, psychologist, M: housewife, F: farmer).

To an even greater extent in answers that made no direct recourse to the national unit there was a clear referencing of the 'community in anonymity' (Anderson, 1983, 36).

What is witnessed in the use of the plural pronoun 'we' or the general pronoun 'you', is that odd effect of a national imagining by which each individual feels enabled to speak for⁶, on behalf of, the body. Importantly, here it is the existence of a 'national tradition' of fiction that enables such statements to operate.

R: Most Nigerians feel proud that we have great intellectuals.

(Male, 21-35, business, M: farmer, F: farmer).

R2: We are all very proud. Even those not interested in literature are very proud of them.

(Female, 21-35, student (literature), M: trader, F: policeman).

R3: It is a source of pride and self esteem as well as hope.

(Female, under 21, student, M: lecturer, F: doctor).

R4: It is very important to every Nigerian because when you read them some give joy etc.

(Male, 21-35, clothing worker, M: business woman, F: local government worker).

Suffice it to point out that this kind of relationship to *Things Fall Apart* could not be offered by Scottish readers except, perhaps, on the back of a preliminary claim to the universal address of fiction, something that would sit extremely uneasily with the novel's final lines. The 'cultural nationalist' tinge to these statements, however, is threatened by facts of recent history. In the shadow of military regimes the relationship between state and nation makes it awkward to consider Soyinka, for

(The similar levels of recognition for Soyinka and Achebe among respondents in Britain seems something of an anomaly placed against the fact that the other authors were all better recognised overseas. The probable explanation is that among a relatively limited sample in the UK (22) there were a number of respondents who had no knowledge of Nigerian writing at all, having more or less consciously severed cultural links with Nigeria. Those that were familiar with Nigerian writing, however, tended to have the material means and the time to read much more widely than most respondents in Nigeria were able. For the larger Nigeria-resident group familiarity with different authors was often a matter of having encountered them in an educational context. I might add that the survey included a control element in as much as there was a false name included. Of the 81 respondents, 3 claimed to be familiar with the contrived figure which indicates that there was only a minimum of over-statement occurring.)

example, a 'national' author. Hence there is a clear negotiation in allocating to these writers the role of 'conscience of the nation'. It is a move which divorces the instituted bodies of state power from some 'deeper' idea of what the nation actually is.⁷ This assertion of the role of the patrimony is, as Bourdieu might argue and as Ngugi in practice does (1998), one of cultural capital's first claims to dominance, to truth value, over against the more direct coercions of the state and of economy.

There is, nevertheless, I would argue, something more than just the effect of constructed national culture in the reception of *Things Fall Apart* in Nigeria. While it is true that in those responses presented above the book is clearly situated in the patrimony, and while this in itself is distinct from the reception by Scottish readers, there remains more to be said. To do so, it is valuable to envisage culture not as a static artefact, but as the product and arena of struggle.⁸ Put at its most commonplace, what I am referring to here is the idea that writing like Achebe's is felt to be meaningful because it has recovered 'our' culture, re-connected the modern subject with a past interrupted by the imperial project of creating good subjects for the Empire,⁹ and secondly, because they focus on the reality of contemporary Nigeria. To the same question then, responses such as:

⁶ I am aware that this is to take the inclusive ideologies of the nation at a face value which they do not merit. Subsequent - and I hope previous - sections will complicate the picture.

⁷ As a respondent in Glasgow said of these writers: '[They are] very important. I cannot forgive the military for killing the likes of Ken Saro-Wiwa[.]' (Male, 36-50, surgeon, M: housewife, F: business man).

⁸ This is line with the position of Terence Ranger (1983, 211-262) and Arif Dirlik's brilliant essay in JanMohamed and Lloyd, (eds.) 1990, 394-431. It is also, in many ways, Bourdieu's point in *Distinction*: '[T]he system of classificatory schemes is constituted as an objectified, institutionalised system of classification only when it has ceased to function as a sense of limits so that the guardians of the established order must enunciate, systematise and codify the principles of the production of that order, both real and represented, so as to defend against heresy; in short, they must constitute the doxa as orthodoxy.' (1984, 480) See also Fanon's discussions of the altering social meaning of the veil, the family and the wireless in the context of the Algerian war of independence. (1965a, 35-146)

⁹ This is a statement of the terms in which Achebe's project is perceived by the readers I worked with. Whether colonialism represented an irreparable culture fracture - which is what Lazarus perceives as the hinge of Fanon's reading in *The Wretched of the Earth* - or whether in fact pre-existent cultural practice was resiliently retained, as Lazarus goes on to suggest, is a different question. Presumably there is no broad single answer. (Lazarus, 1999a, 82-97) The imposition of warrant chiefs in the east of

R: Most Nigerian novelist tend to focused on the Nigerian situations so this is important to most Nigerians.

(Male, 21-35, teacher (commercial college), M: housewife, F: teacher).

R2: It's important in the sence that it gives them [Nigerians] knowledge about our tradition.

(Male, 21-35, security guard, M: farmer, F: farmer).

It was clear that to many of the respondents fiction authored by Nigerian writers was seen as a repository for knowledge about both past practices and current situations. In response to a question asking why readers read Nigerian fiction I received answers such as the following, at least some of which demonstrated a definitively combative sense of loyalty to local writers:

R: Do [to?] know more about Africa.

(Male, 21-35, 'travelling', M: civil servant, F: civil servant).

R2: [...] To get myself in touch with my African tradition and culture.

(Female, under 21, student, M: teacher, F: contract builder).

R3: The [they?] appeal more to me, easy to understand and are in most cases related to out culture and history.

(Male, 36-50, business, M: housewife and farmer, F: soldier).

R4: Because the [they?] tell me to an extend [extent?] what real happens in the country.

(Female, 21-35, pharmacist, M: business woman, F: business man).

R5: [...] The themes of most of these works are relevant to my society.

(Male, 21-35, p/t lecturer, M: tailor, F: electrician).

The expected caveat here is that there is no possible recovery of any pristine 'tradition', only a presentation of what were, in themselves, forms of social presentation. Postcolonial elites have often, of course, used the supposed recovery of tradition as a ploy in the stabilising of a conservative hegemony as Ranger (1983), among others (e.g. Mathieson and Attwell, 1998) argues. Once again, however, it is not enough to dismiss these possessive readings of Nigerian fiction on this charge because, in case we forget, Achebe's project *was* intervening against a process of European historiography that systematically underplayed African agency. *Things Fall Apart* remains an important intervention in 'live history.' Statements such as the

Nigeria, for example, had a well documented and disruptive effect, whereas Lugard's policy of 'indirect' rule articulated well with the remnants of the caliphate in the North (Ayandele, 1966; Hodgkin, 1975; Last, 1967; Williams, 1980; Watts, 1987). See appendix.

following (2 from the Zaria group, 1 from Jos) cannot be read as simply conservative yearnings after some always elusive cultural taproot.

R: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. [...] Well, by my own perspective Chinua Achebe wrote this book in order for us Africans to realise that our former culture, religion and even politics, how we ... how it were before the intervention of the Europeans, you discovered immediately the Europeans came to intervene, to our way of life, I meant the culture the religion and the politics [...] Chinua Achebe wrote this book for the coming generation to realise the need that our former culture was better than the European intervention. (applause)

R2: Good morning everyone [...] The book *Things Fall Apart*, I think written by Chinua Achebe I think was written to conscientise (?) the coming generation, to show them the way the African society was before, to show them the *unity*, the way everything was, and to show them what brought this about, their falling apart. And how they can now be able to make better their own situation and how they can be able to go back to the way things was before, that is to make everything better for themselves now. That's all I have to say. (some applause)

R3: All I'm trying to say here is this man wrote this novel for us Nigerians [...] he wrote for the Nigerians to understand that before the coming of the white man, before colonialism, they had their own culture. [...] we had *our own culture*. Nigerians, black men, Nigerians had their own culture. I think that is the main purpose of why (?) he wrote the book.

To talk about 'unity' in contemporary Nigeria is to employ a heavily loaded term, given the recent debates about a federal structure and the re-emergent questions of regional independence. But it is not just this, the new meaningfulness of narrative in changing circumstances, that matters. It is that the book is part of 'our own culture', where that culture is still a result and means of struggle. 'For the coming generation' - that repeated phrase - not just to remember what they come from, but to remember in the context of the repercussions of the history Achebe fictionalises.

In Zaria, conducting a discussion with second year sociology students about Achebe's novel, I had just posed the question: 'Why did the author write this book?' The following answer began by observing the protocols of the situation but suddenly stopped and instead the respondent used the novel as a fulcrum to invert the dynamics of the situation and to force the questioner to become the one who is questioned. In other words, demand that I make account of *my* relationship to imperialism. By implication, that I make recognition of something which I could neither defend nor

escape, my entanglement, then and there, with the very anthropological model that is the target of Achebe's irony in the conclusion of the book.

R: I think, ok, like, you asked the question, you said, what motivated Achebe to write this book. [...] The core function of our course is this social formation, is to reconstruct the Africa past ... I mean it felt to (?) that the Europeans came to disorganise our system, so we and, and he really sympathised with what, with the aftermath of the, I mean after the Europeans came. So he now wanted to analyse what happened, how, how our culture was, our ways of life, our, our let me call it political and economic and social system, how they were, he didn't like the way the Europeans came to disorganise the system, so he felt about it, so he now, it was a kind of, he was trying to analyse how the Europeans came to disorganise the system ... Excuse me sir, I want to ask you this question. Can you, can you, ok, you are a European, can you in your way, can you justify the coming of the Europeans, don't you think those people came to disorganise our system, can you justify that they came, I mean for our own good or for their own good? Please I want you to answer the question.

Much more than responses to direct questions, this moment puts on display that which must distinguish the reception of *Things Fall Apart* for Nigerian readers. It is a differentiation which itself lies in the act of a differentiation, in the way in which Achebe's novel becomes a pivotal co-ordinate from which the divide between 'ours' and 'theirs' is mapped. This is still an important staking out. Notwithstanding the sedative employment of the concepts of tradition and history by Africa's post-independence rulers, when 'our culture' becomes a means by which to pose questions about the relationship between current and past exploitations, it is the very opposite of conservative.

For those expatriate Nigerians interviewed in Glasgow also, if fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* was significant, this was because it was felt to be a cardinal point in the mapping of identity. A number of interviewees said that they felt threatened by some potential loss of connection with their home while they were abroad, either on their own behalf, or more specifically on behalf of children born in the UK.

R: [Y]ou cannot abandon your roots[.] [F]or example, my children, none of them was born in this country [...] I have taught them that whatever you do you must remember your background, your roots [...] Identify with this area while at the same time they don't, they don't really alienate themselves from the original roots.
(Male, 36-50, lecturer, M: trader, F: 'public works').

No self-respecting contemporary theorist would now make an unqualified reference to 'roots'. Or fail to amend a note to the effect that a unitary 'culture' is always an object in the act of being recovered, always chased like a rainbow, and equally elusive. For those respondents cited above and for the Nigerian expatriates interviewed in Glasgow, however, it was a necessary and transparent terminology. The following quote makes clear that the recovery of something felt to be a cultural possession was often an act asserted in the face of prejudice. A negation of a negation, in the terms of JanMohamed and Lloyd's analysis (1990), culture as struggle.

R: I don't have a kid yet although (?) I've given it a thought I know that one of the things I want to achieve is, you know, if I have a kid abroad to make sure that he or she does not lose, you know, the roots. [...] [A]nd as much as possible that he carries a kind of cultural identity and a kind of flavour of the tradition and so, I guess, as I said, you want him or her to visit home as soon as possible to, to get to know that this is where he or she comes from, to know that, to know that, you know, he has a culture and that there is a place where he or she could be treated, you know, as a king. [...] I mean racism is real and you get some of (?) these remarks so it's always good for kids to get to know that this is where they come from and [...] some of the things they get to see on television or hear kids, other kids, you know talk about, are not really true. [...]

A: [I]f you were to have children here and for some reason you could not go back to Nigeria, would you feel that reading Nigerian fiction like Achebe, Amadi, Osundare, all these people, would be a, some way of keeping them in touch with the culture?

R: Definitely that's something I think I will push across very strongly ... at an early age they should be able to both read about it and as I've said before have some physical touch with the culture[.]

(Male, 21-35, lecturer, M: trader, F: trader).

The consideration of a novel like *Things Fall Apart* by migrant Nigerian readers was surprisingly similar to that of non-migrant Nigerian readers. In both cases it was seen as a locus point on the curve of cultural differentiation. It matters therefore that the first interviewee cited above kept a copy of *Things Fall Apart* on the shelf in his office and said of it: 'I think it's a classic. That's my view anyway. I think it's a fantastic book.' When I agreed with this and then went on to explain about teaching the novel in Stranraer, he quickly added:

R: You need to, you need to first of all if you can, because you know there are parts of that novel where he has used Igbo and in an attempt to translate the Igbo thing there into English the beauty disappears. [...] *So you can only understand what he's saying if you are part of that.*

Cultural practice is about ways of behaving, speaking, defining, envisaging, it is about learned habits and adaptations. To talk of recovering this, of keeping in touch with it, using fiction as a means to remember: this is not just a futile gesture, it is an attempt to give value to a work of distinction in Bourdieu's sense.

Equally, as the third section of this chapter will treat in more detail, this does not prevent the very loci of distinction doubling up, so that they might include distinctions imposed over and against members of the group, *as forms of what is distinct*. In other words, it matters what pieces of cultural production are made the site of significant investment. To put novel fiction to this use is comfortable enough for those who have access to it, especially the relatively middle-class expatriate community interviewed here. But as we shall see in a subsequent section this places those who do not read novel fiction in a very excluded position. Or, to give a slightly different example in this regard:

R: [M]ost of what they are writing is not new to the people. [...] Because in reality they are serving as people who, who are trying to put the traditions of their people down in writing for record purpose, so, most of things they will be writing the people are aware of them because it's their culture. [...] They want people to see that this is their tradition, this is their culture and that, er that culture has a significance to the people and say, if you have read Chinua Achebe about (?) *Things Fall Apart* and maybe he says, talking about a woman, 'he said "sit like a woman". So, in the African culture, not just the Igbo, in the Nigerian tradition, a woman should not sit say in a skirt and open her legs because we ... it's immoral for a woman to sit and open her laps, yes, particularly, these days you have people wearing trousers so that's not a problem. Yes, so, er, that is what that phrase will mean, reminding the woman that she is not sitting properly, she's sitting carelessly, yes so there is nothing new in, to any Nigerian [.]

We can see a clear link here between the putative national culture and the licensing of male authority, and this only emphasises the fact that culture involves real practices, and that these may serve a dual and paradoxical purpose: both as the possible licensing of oppressions, and as a co-ordinate from which to map defence against other oppressions.¹⁰

¹⁰ Correlation in this regard is found in Abdulrahim's (1993) study of Palestinian women in Berlin and her conclusion that it is often the behaviour inscribed as female that comes to stand as most normative,

The hinge of hegemony.

Apart from the fact that it allows a deliberate contrast with the reception of the same novel among Scottish readers, the focus on *Things Fall Apart* in this chapter occurs because most respondents in interview quickly referenced it as a 'classic' Nigerian text. Its position as an internationally recognised novel, canonised by both sales and critical opinion, give it a peculiar charge that led respondents who read very little fiction to strongly affirm their stake in the text.

Briefly mentioned above is the attitude towards the novel among expatriate Nigerians. Throughout this thesis I have been using the term migrancy to refer almost exclusively to movement between national contexts. Even in the face of increasingly powerful transnational finance bodies, it remains true that for most individuals it is a form of state, tied in some respects to a delineated territory, that determines the most immediate impingements and limitations on their lives. However, the fit between local cultural practice and that hazy thing - a national culture - may be shifting and indeterminate. Although I have difficulties with much of what Papastergiadis says in *The Turbulence of Migration*, his insistence in this respect that the term migrant is often given too broad a reference is undeniable (e.g. 2000, 199). Someone born an Igbo who, as part of their post-University national service, is asked to spend a year in Sokoto, for example, undertakes a migrancy that is, in cultural terms, dramatic. In Britain we could suggest journeys that involve a move between cultural contexts, even linguistic ones. But Britain has a long history of media, literary and pedagogic

most invested with symbolic importance for the group in the expatriate context. Therefore, of course, that it may be most constraining for the subject expected to embody this cultural ideal. Massey argues, similarly, that European women have often been given the image of the stable domestic curators whose

development of a national culture. Even accounting for sites of determined resistance to this process, when we are taught to think Britain as a national culture, we are taught something strengthened by a background of prior efforts to produce that national imaginary. For Nigeria, facing not only a distinct north-south divide given religious expression, but also a vast number of ethnic distinctions and differences in historical experience, it is debatable whether anything like a national culture exists. For many of the military post-independence regimes the development of hegemony as a surety of their position simply did not occur, and in place there remained a reliance on the more direct enforcement of military control. Fanon's prediction, towards the end of his life, that what threatened independent Africa was not colonialism but 'the absence of ideology', a national culture to place some break on the middle-classes' rapidly developing 'great appetites', has been largely borne out. (Fanon, 1967a, 186)

Certainly the journey made by a Chamba man from Adamawa state (in the North-east of Nigeria) to the financial centres in Lagos, involves a genuine cultural crossing. He narrates something of the experience himself:

R: Er, yes well if, if one compares like my travelling from Kano, where I'm stationed to let's say Lagos or Ibadan, er, the feeling is slightly better than my coming from Kano to Scotland. [...] If I travel from Northern Nigeria to, let's say Lagos for example, sometimes I will be shocked. There was a time in December, I left Kano, it was harmattan, so it was cold, so I wore my suit and all these things. When I landed in the airport in Lagos, Man - it was hot and humid, so I had to remove my [mimes taking off jacket] So, that's one. Two ... language, there is that tendency in Lagos, most people will either speak Yoruba to you or broken, broken or pidgin english yeah to you. Anyone who has gone to school will not have problems because you can pick up pidgin, [...] but if someone speaks Yoruba, well, it, it would be difficult for you to appreciate that ... So, and then the other thing is food, difference in food. [...] [F]or someone who has not gone to school it is an entirely different thing. 'Cause the type of food you meet there will be er, quite, quite different. [...] And, of course, still, we have this problem of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria: the Yoruba, the Igbos and the Hausas, when a Hausa man goes to a Yoruba speaking area ... there is this look that, you know, look at this, look at this goat or something, you know [...] There is this look of contempt, look at this here...

A: But, even for you as a Chamba rather than a Hausa?

R: No, no it will shock you to know that a Yoruba man does not consider that there are other tribes in Northern Nigeria. When you come from Northern Nigeria you are a Hausa man as far as a Yoruba man is concerned [...] So also the Igbo man. When

existence licences the travelling male. (1992, 11-12). See also the discussion in chapter 4 and Appadurai, 1996, 43-45.

you are from Northern Nigeria you are a Hausa man. So, there's no difference, there's no difference at all.

(Male, 21-35, public health worker, M: housewife, F: education officer).

Many of those who answered questionnaires in Jos, and who had never left the country, still listed extended itineraries of previous destinations - 'Jos, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Enugu, Aba, Abia, Kaduna, Kano, Abuja, Lagos, Cross River State, Uyo, Bauchi'¹¹ - that represent an experience of different cultural contexts, a migrancy, equivalent to anything that might be undertaken within the European Union.

In the face of this diversity, what does it mean to talk of, or to imply, the 'local' reader? The question I mean to pose, in other words, is how do non-Igbo Nigerian readers approach *Things Fall Apart*? To look at this relationship, given the novel's status in the canon of Nigerian writing, is to focus precisely on the hinge-point of hegemony, at that pivot where local culture articulates with a national culture neither assured nor fully established. I pick out in what follows three broad tactics that non-Igbo readers employed when marking their relationship to Achebe's novel. To open up this hinge of hegemony, to search for, as these readers sought, an angle at which it will bear their weight, presents an awkward balancing act. Because, as we have seen, it means the simultaneous claiming of a stake in the culture product, but at the same time, in relation to a broader audience, defining that stake of belonging in terms of those to whom it *does not* belong. It is the attempt to both open and close a parenthesis at once.¹²

¹¹ This list from one respondent is certainly not untypical of the range of destinations inside Nigeria that were visited, especially among University graduates.

¹² I should note here, that despite my hesitancy over the idea of any Nigerian 'national' culture, the theme of 'unity in diversity' is one that has obviously been of very long-standing employment, not only in Nigeria, but in the majority of ex-colonial nations, facing similar questions over the national imaginary. What is being discussed here, therefore, is not a startling new conception, but the variations, in use, of a familiar idea.

Most straightforwardly a number of readers referred to the clear *correspondences* between the Igbo setting of Achebe's novel and what was familiar to them as equivalent practices and symptoms from their own backgrounds as Yoruba, Busa, Hausa, Igala etc. These examples are taken from the discussion in Zaria:

R: You see, though I'm not an Igbo, I'm an Igala from Kogi state, but yet I see Chinua Achebe's work using the Igbo to represent the African society or the African set-up as being reasonable. [...] There are a lot of similarities there. Like the religious aspect. Like Chinua Achebe they have what is known as Chukuma or something like that. In my culture we have names like that portraying the image of god, like Ojonay, that is 'god has', Ojine 'god cares', you know? [...] when you come to the political, that is you choose, we have elders, title-holders, in my place it's also the same thing. [...] There are a lot of things I see there which portray the, which portray my own culture as well.

R2: I'm a bona fide indigene of Kontagora local government in Niger State. And we in Hausa region we believe in one single ruler, which happened to be a spiritual and religious, religious and political leader. Now, *if you look at how Achebe stratified the society we can take the title holders in TFA to represent this our emirs, obas in Yoruba region and chi (?) of Igala.* Secondly we can use us, we the citizens as commoners, the way he stratified the second class as commoners. We use ourselves as citizens as thirdly the *osu* which he regarded as second-class citizens, we also have it. [...] Secondly, we should look at it as the way things, Chinua Achebe was able to portray how Africans were so much obedience [...] which I'm definitely sure all, it crossed, it cut across all African societies.

To make the sociologist's objection that the institutions of the Yoruba oba, the northern emir and the Igbo title-holder are hardly synonymous is to miss the point. We are not discussing history here but a second-order presentation, as the latter quote makes clear. It matters less whether Chukwu is isomorphic with other deities than that this claimed correspondence *is* claimed, and is claimed in order to legitimate that primary claim, that the book is 'ours'.¹³

What these asserted similarities amount to is the opening gambit in a synecdochal tactic of reading.

R: To me I think it's a Nigerian novel. Because the culture - it's not my culture - it's like, similar to my own culture. [...] [T]he tradition or culture is what? Same. Almost the same.

¹³ Nor, as argued above, does the correlation need to be a positive one. As one women reader said: 'I think, I believe he was trying to, he portrayed the whole, he was representing the, he was using the Igbo culture to represent the whole African culture. Because I can say from like the Hausa tradition, we still put women at the back, women are still behind they are not brought up.'

‘Same. Almost the same.’ This hesitant statement of correspondence becomes, to other readers, a repeated formula:

R: I think it’s a *Nigerian novel that has an Igbo setting*.

R2: The novel is a Nigerian one, it’s just that the author of the novel is from that Igbo or Western [sic] part[.]

This also represented one of the key reasons given by respondents for their readership of Nigerian novels:

R: To be able to know about Nigerian cultures and traditions.

(Male, 36-50, clinical psychologist, M: housewife, F: peasant farmer).

R2: It [Nigerian literature] has help a lot of Nigerians by making them know more about other parts of the regions culture.

(Male, 21-35, library assistant, M: business woman, F: retired ‘military officer’).

The specific as representative of a broader whole, with the text acting as the pivot in this hinge between local and national culture. This reading tactic by non-Igbo readers, although specifically necessary in this context, partakes of that broader ideal of the synecdochal figure which is the perfect ideological image of the national subject: each individual citizen ‘a Nigerian’, the whole immanent in each individual’s sense of self. We are back on Bhabha’s uncertain ground in which the very ‘pluralism of the national sign, where *difference returns as the same*’ (1994, 154, my italics) makes it available as sight of contested closure, always threatened by the supplementary. And it would be blasé to ignore the fact that there has been a great deal of recent debate in Nigeria on the part of various groups about inclusion and exclusion from the national body. Indeed read economically, something Bhabha rarely inclines to, the struggle of the delta peoples to receive a fairer share of the oil-wealth derived from their immediate homelands is exactly a struggle against the synecdochal trick of national (and, more crucially, global) economics whereby locally extracted surplus makes an insufficient return as a merely gestural investment in the region’s infrastructure.

Nevertheless, when these readings assert that ‘[*Things Fall Apart*] is a Nigerian Novel with an Igbo setting’¹⁴, and thereby assert their own claim that it ‘belongs to’ them, part of what makes that synecdochal claim important is the fact that Nigeria comes to exist through colonial history. And what makes it a necessary claim, one that cannot be assumed as unspoken, is the very fragility of that unity which is being asserted. We could read this again as an affirmation arising from the negation of a prior negation, and one made in a contemporary context which has regularly threatened to dissolve the affirmation of independence. In this respect the text and its reception repeat a complex version of Anderson’s ‘fusing’. To explain: while Achebe’s work attempts to negate the negation of African agency in colonial history, the reader’s assertion of his novel as Nigerian, itself repeats in the contemporary the same affirmation that Nigeria exists because we say it exists, despite, not because of, the circumstances of its production. Simultaneously, therefore, it reasserts the agency of the reader themselves.

The students in Zaria had been reading excerpts from Lugard’s writing as part of their course. It is against this kind of fictionalisation of Africa that Achebe’s fictionalisation was seen as being poised:

R: Let us look at what Lugard, Lord Lugard did in his voluminous piece (applause). he was able to deceive us. We are just reading jargons in what he said. It’s not what African was. [...] I mean Achebe was able to use the logical devices like he used flashback which really patrolled the, I mean portrayed the past history of Africa [...] so we give credit to Achebe for this book.

R2: I think we should just look at this novel as a representation of a counteraction against the anthropological and ethnocentric representation by the Europeans. Which they should, they said we in Africans we are, Africa is a dark continent, we lack civilisation, we are very aggressive and so on and so forth, so we should look at this novel as an contradiction against those [attitudes].

The historical context of this synecdochal tactic of reading matters. It is an assertion made in the face of a history that still threatens national disaggregation.

¹⁴ This particular statement was the written answer of a person who could not attend one of the reading groups.

On the part of some readers, however, there was an important third tactic of reading which it seems to me, moves the synecdochal away from Bhabha's conception in which it appears always negatively reductive. It is a form of dual move seeking not just to re-value the terms of a historical negation, as in the above, but also to question the fundamental terms in which the negation took place. That is to say, a re-assertion of specificity.

R: I see his work as very, very important. Because one, the aim of the book is to tell us how African culture were before things now fell apart. And also to make us understand, and to, and to make us understand how we can reconstruct the African society. You see the African set-up before the coming of the white man it was, it was very, very rich. [...] What he's trying to tell us is that *not using the Igbo society to represent the whole African culture as a whole* but he's trying to tell us to see our own culture, irrespective of which part of Africa you come from, to see your culture as, I mean, to kind of respect your culture and stick to your own culture and not just sticking to the white man alone[.]

Here, it is not that Igbo society comes to stand in as a metonymic substitute for disparate experience but that, in Achebe's presentation of its very specificity, it recalls the specificity of other cultural orders. And, of course, it recalls how these were *and are* denied in their own specificity, both discursively (by colonial historiography and by the contemporary global media) and economically (by the colonial distortion of local production and the current international division of labour). If the novel seeks to re-affirm the individual nature of negated practice it is, paradoxically, in this affirmation of the particular, that it allows a sense of homologous historical experience. 'I would still say that the novel here is an Igbo novel written for the Nigerian,' one respondent began '*[b]ecause* when we look at the novel *as an Igbo novel*, it talks about the fall of the Igbo man to Christianity[.]' This is an extraordinarily fragile tactic. The book as a 'sign' of national culture, is read, not just in such a way that difference is synecdochically allowed to return as the same. But rather, it is only in the affirmation of this particularity that there is something broader, the hope of a shared project in the very assertion of particular experience. By

themselves imaginings are hardly enough to hold a country together, but what these last readings struggled towards, and they were in some senses exceptional, was a means to operate the hinge between local and national culture so that it could bear the weight of both.

The problematic here is one of unity and difference, and as such is obviously related to the whole issue of cosmopolitanism being addressed in this thesis. As Eagleton points out (1998a) we perhaps forget that current critical suggestions of the need to think identity *in and through* differences rather than against them, share surprising ground with Marx's own discussion of human individualism and sociality. Contrary to the grand liberal abstraction of universal equality which had as its reified model the bland exchangeability of the commodity, Marx sought to reinstate the sensuous particularity of the human being as its key shared capacity. 'The clue to our capacity for differences lies in the structures of our shared mental nature, which determine us to be, within limits, self-determining.' (Eagleton, 1998a, 50)¹⁵ What crucially distinguishes Marx's position from that of much recent theory is the further assertion that it is the tragedy of capitalism to have made this capacity unrealisable.¹⁶ As Mészáros (1972) argues, in denying the human capability for a certain level of self-determination it replaces a genuine form of possible individualism, grounded in

¹⁵ See, for example, Marx's position in the 1844 manuscripts, or in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*: 'The human being is in the most literal sense [...] an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.' (1973, 84)

¹⁶ The model being used here, in practice, by non-Igbo readers will be familiar to readers of *The Black Atlantic*. Paul Gilroy employs the related metaphor of antiphonal performance to describe the unity in difference of black diasporan culture and its continuity as a 'changing same'. Just as I am suggesting that it is the existence of the inequalities upon which capitalism is grounded that problematise the use of the idea in *this* context, I would suggest that it presents similarly awkward questions for Gilroy. These are staged most notably in the negotiation he is required to make so as to advance the claim that such cultural items as rap singles can in some sense escape commodification and achieve an attenuated replica of the relationship between artist and audience typical of oral art (1993, 96-109). Rather than tradition as an unchanging core, Gilroy posits a mutable, perpetual diasporan 'conversation' mediated by 'nameless, evasive, minimal qualities' (199). This anti-essentialist argument seems unobjectionable, but it relies for its effectiveness on a disavowing of the fact that this evasive and unnamed quality which makes possible cross-Atlantic cultural transmission, is primarily the operation of exchange value within the circuit of cultural capitalism.

sociality, with an asserted but spurious individualism, grounded in our estrangement. This gives us deskilling instead of the development of individual ability and such false cosmopolitanisms as imperial conquest and globalisation instead of practices that might foster a global unity. It is also, therefore, what threatens a material disproof to these discursive tactics of reading on the part of young Nigerians, which in many ways, do adopt independently this same template of unity and difference. It is also why this thesis has sought continually to reinsert a sense of structure alongside the arena of the imaginative and why, in the subsequent section, I go on to consider the degree to which novel fiction is hardly a sufficient marker of social unity. This said, these readings which assert unity through specificity do reach towards that kind of recognition of homologous experience which I have suggested is the paradoxical offering of migrant fiction and which I employed in the analysis of Kanchana Ugbabe's work in chapter four. In this respect, her own statement that it is 'through being authentic that [the author] achieves universality' (1993a) neatly catches the issue, and repeats a position argued by previous Nigerian writers.

Non-readings and distinction.

In discussing distinction in what follows, I am inevitably also discussing *Distinction*, Bourdieu's massive study of the stratifying work of taste. This turn is made in order to problematise the foregoing sections where assertions of national culture have been allowed to pass largely unquestioned and where the claims of the subject to belong are operated through the claim that a canonical text belongs *to* them. In what follows the attempt is made to show how this possessive statement in relation to a given cultural artefact can operate as a form of distinction between fractions within the national

population. That this is the case appears initially to be only too apparent in such comments as the following:¹⁷

R: I think the more enlightened most Nigerians get the more we would appreciate our novelists.

(Male, age not given, student, M: business woman, F: manager).

R2: Not very important except to those interested in reading novels.

(Male, 21-35, various manual jobs, M: baker, F: electrician).

R3: Nigeria is a country of about 70% not well inform. Those who know the importance of reading I can say know how important this is.

(Male, 36-50, clerical worker, M: housewife, F: contractor).

These kind of answers, which obviously ascribe to the possession of cultural capital a currency of enlightenment, demonstrate very clearly that circular logic of distinction of which Bourdieu talks, whereby the very recognition of a position of enlightenment is itself a claim to the entitlement of that position. The fact that access to novel fiction is extremely restricted is perfectly conducive to its being adopted as evidence of a quality believed to be exclusive.

Prior to examining this in more detail some provisos need to be added. A key thrust of Bourdieu's thesis is that there is an on-going battle between the dominant and dominated fractions of the ruling class. A battle for the authoritative position, i.e. over the right to define which principle of hierarchy should be constitutive of the social field. In this respect he refers to the chiasitic structure of differentiation, determined by two opposing, but transferable, forms of capital: the economic and the cultural. While Bourdieu clearly does argue that 'there is nothing more universal than the project of objectifying mental structures associated with the particularity of a social structure' (1984, xiv), he makes it equally clear in the same preface that he is analysing just that, a particular social structure at a particular time. The stratifying role of taste, of differentiation objectified *in acts of differentiation*, may be a common human fact, but its currencies and principles are related to specific histories of

¹⁷ The question being answered is: Nigeria has a tradition of great novelists. How important do you think this is to most Nigerians?

struggle that constitute specific fields. In short, it would be a categorical mistake to seek to transpose, en masse, Bourdieu's analysis to contemporary Nigeria, even if this thesis could claim a depth of survey sufficient to back-up the attempt.

Culture, in the restricted literary sense, is an extravagance. This, of course, is Bourdieu's point and why its possession can act as a marker of class, because it presupposes and bears objectified witness to a material ease. The primary distinction which underlies all that follows is between those for whom literature (for example) can begin to function as a stake in the games of distinction and those for whom the question of physical survival renders unthinkable even the basic price of entrance into the game of high culture. This differentiation is recognised by respondents to the same question cited above, who said:

R: Not much. This is not Nigerian's major concern. Their concern is survival, daily meals, how to make ends meet.

(Male, 36-50, student (former editor), M: housewife, F: soldier).

R2: I don't think it's of great importance cos most Nigerians don't read, only a select few.

(Female, 21-35, student, M: beautician, F: engineer)

R3: Not very important, people are preoccupied thinking of where to get their next meal.

(Female, 21-25, guesthouse manager, M: headmistress, F: school inspector).

R4: Not quite important. Most Nigerians are illiterates and poor and think more of survival.

(Male, 36-50, nursing tutor, M: peasant farmer, F: peasant farmer).

As the very fact of the completion of the questionnaire testifies, these references to illiteracy are references to a differentiation looked upon from the safe hinterland of possession. All forms of distinction are about the ability to de-code symbolic objects, hence the ability to 'read' them. The literacy/illiteracy divide is clearly fundamental in this regard. Even beyond this ground zero distinction, however, the access to literature is delimited in other ways. In one of the most powerful sections of *Distinction* Bourdieu points out, in relation to the canvassing of political opinion, that the 'right to speak', the right to have an opinion, is also socially licensed, contrary to the claims of the liberal democracy (411- 417). To have no opinion is not just a function of being

unfamiliar with the subject matter; it is also a question of not having the right to know. In this respect, those questionnaires returned by manual workers which left the section on 'reading' blank are witnesses to the distinction between those with and those without the right to such opinions. In the terms of the respondent already cited, the divide between the 'select' and non-select '70%' as experienced on its other side. Or at the least, that fraction of the 'non-select' which owns sufficient educational capital to make the decoding of literature a potential possibility, but who are excluded from the realisation of this possibility by the subsequent filtering of economics. The written responses of a compound sweeper, born to farming parents, educated to secondary school level, can give some voice by proxy to those other questionnaire responses whose silence I have no way to incorporate here:

Q: How many *stories*, on average, do you read in a month?

R: Not even one.

Q: Who are your *favourite* writers and favourite books?

R: I don't read novels so I have no favourite books.

Q: Have you read much *Nigerian fiction*?

R: No.

Q: What were (or are) your reasons for doing so?

R: Because I have no time for reading them.

This final answer catches the fact very starkly. Time is the one commodity that this man can socially dispose of. To invest it in reading fiction, whose only potential return is a form of symbolic capital with retrievable value in a market to which he has no hope of access, is inconceivable. Immediate needs require immediate returns, the less the options available to the individual, the less free 'formally free' labour becomes. This is the baseline of distinction.¹⁸

There is some evidence, in the material gathered, to justify the idea of a distinct fraction, within the elite itself, whose position is differentiated by possession

¹⁸ Hence 'the importance which the pursuit of distinction attaches to all those activities which, like artistic consumption, demand pure, pointless expenditure, especially of the rarest and most precious thing of all - particularly for those whose market value gives them least of it to waste - namely time[.]' (Bourdieu, 1984, 281)

of the codes of legitimate culture *over and against* a fraction whose dominance is primarily a matter of economic capital. Of those respondents, for example, who recognised 7 or more of the Nigerian authors listed¹⁹ almost all worked in positions associated with higher levels of cultural capital, or were studying subjects tending to offer cultural capital returns: librarian, journalist, part-time lecturer, editor, students of english or literature.²⁰ On the other hand, a large number of those who claimed never to read fiction - as opposed to simply leaving the whole section on reading blank - were professionals, whose reading was tailored to the forms of 'doxic knowledge' appropriate to their specific sub-fields: engineers, nurse tutor, managers, trainee psychologist, laboratory technician.²¹ Hence such dismissive answers to the question about reading fiction as those that follow:

R: I'm so much interested in scientific development of the world and not stories.

(Male, 21-35, mining engineer, M: poultry farmer, F: businessman).

R2: I concentrate mostly on professional materials.

(Male, 36-50, clinical nursing instructor, M: farmer, F: farmer).

Looked at in relation to social trajectory this pattern becomes a little clearer. Those respondents whose parents were *both* from the categories petty trader, farmer, housewife read - as an average - 0.89 pieces of fiction a month. In contrast, those for whom *both* parents had held primarily white-collar positions or equivalent (e.g.

¹⁹ i.e. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi Emecheta, Festus Iyayi. Ken Saro-Wiwa, Jaye Soewu [control], Ben Okri, Uchenna Ubesie, Amos Tutuola, D.O. Fagunwa.

²⁰ In a neat variation of the extraction of capital by virtue of position, there were a number of respondents here who worked in and around Jos University library as security or cleaning staff and who had, in their time there, accumulated at least this superficial familiarity with the symbolically important figures of anglophone Nigerian literature.

²¹ Interviewees in Glasgow agreed:

A: I don't know how much fiction you read ... do you read much?

R: Well, no. You know, you know, medical people we, we have so many books to keep us going...

[separate interview]

A: How many novels would you say that you read in a month?

R1: Well, now, none.

R2: I would say none, either.

R1: Probably just ... I only read magazines apart from newspapers [...] Because I'm in the financial field I read economics just to keep me up to date.

This habit of reading is, one imagines, hardly unique to Nigerian professionals.

professionals, civil service,²² university lectureships, officer ranks of the armed forces) read - again as an average - 1.94 stories a month. It was those in the intermediate position, however, for whom one or more parents had held a semi-skilled manual or equivalent position (driver, baker, electrician, non-commissioned ranks of the army - in short non-elite service work: not peasant farming or trading) who claimed to read on average the most fiction per month. (2.15) The recognition of the names of authors repeated the pattern with the first group claiming familiarity with a mean of 4.56, the most elite group recognising 5.11 and the intermediate section 5.56.

Although this is very limited material, taken together this evidence may suggest the following. Access to literature presupposes a level of disposable economic capital that is primarily found among those most established sections of the elite. Crossing this is the fact that the distinction of an elite position is primarily determined by economic capital and does not demand anything more than the most rudimentary level of cultural capital, as an essay of Achebe's once argued. (1975, 38-41; see also Griswold's discussion of the 'educated illiterates' 2000, 84). As a result, the reading of fiction is most prevalent among two groups: that fraction whose position is *practically* related to familiarity with these privileged forms of cultural product and those for whom an upward social trajectory is primarily dependent on the accumulation of educational capital and for whom any reading appears therefore as an investment.²³ There are, no doubt, alternative ways in which to read this evidence. It is sufficient, nevertheless, to reveal what is hidden in the discussions of literary reception above, in which the novel is used as an exemplar of the patrimony: i.e. it is

²² 'Civil servant' proved to be quite an awkward category to judge. Some respondents who I knew personally to hold positions in institutions such as cleaning work, described their own employment as 'civil service'. In this context it is used only where supplementary information in the questionnaire suggests that it means government civil service or equivalent clerical work. I have to accept in general here that my information on parental occupation was never as complete as I would have wished.

sufficient to demonstrate that the very possibility of being familiar with the patrimony is a mark of distinction.²⁴

In Bourdieu's analysis the dominated fraction of the dominant class, those rich in cultural capital, distinguish their consumption of cultural items by the adoption of a 'pure' aesthetic, typified in the ideal of *l'art pour l'art*. The legitimate form, then, of the consumption of art - as sketched in the previous chapter - is that which derives its pristine pleasure, not from anything as crude as enjoyment of the story, but from the formal aspects of the work itself.

R: Most Nigerians are illiterate so it does not matter. But for the few enlightened, they fail to realise that writing involves so much work.

In response to the same question, posing the importance of literature, this respondent neatly delineates the double distinction between those whose wealth gives them access to literature and those who know how to appreciate it correctly.²⁵ This

²³ As Griswold points out, socio-economic conditions in Nigeria mean that 'reading is inclined to be more instrumental than ludic, more aimed at acquiring the skills and knowledge needed for social and occupational mobility.' (2000, 110)

²⁴ One of the interviewees in Glasgow, looking back, gives this account. I have just asked about the interest in novel fiction in Nigeria:

R: [T]he honest answer to that question is that em... is that em, in Nigeria... what will I say. It's not a fair question. Because novel reading or fiction reading is recreational. And you do much of that where you have comfort, but in the context of you're just managing to survive, you know, it will go down on your list. Because in truth my stopping to read novels or fiction was not just because of my medical work as a student and as a doctor, it was also because one) the books started disappearing. [...] You know? Ngugi wa Thiong'o, some Kenyan and all of that, but they stopped production because they who are writing, some moved away, some joined struggle for freedom.. the same thing with the pacesetters series, that was purely a Nigerian thing so that one too stopped. And it is: what you see, you read. That's one. Two) Even those that are publishing like Ben Okri, his popular book for which he won the British thing, was too expensive to buy in a Nigerian setting. Do you understand?

A: Yes I do, yes.

R: So, that would a difficult question to analyse, you have to put it in the social context. Because, um, as I said, my brother had all the African Writers Series, most if not all of them, and I read them... When they were not being produced, or when he found them too expensive, he stopped buying them [...] And really, really, economic power is a very serious factor in what we are saying now, because in the 70's and early 80's, that I was in primary school and secondary school, we had money, you know, so buying those things were not issues. But, when I was in the University, the primary concern is to feed, and buy absolutely necessary text-books for your study, you understand?

(Male, 21-35, medical doctor, M: trader, F: school-teacher).

²⁵ Asked to rate between 1 and 10, the factors they considered most important in a story there was a marked difference between those questionnaires distributed and returned on the campus of Jos University and those distributed and returned at a residential guesthouse. Most notably, the former set of responses produced an average of 7.36 to the option 'The actual style of writing', whereas the latter set offered 5.8. A third group of respondents, again largely professional, gave 5.3. Broadly speaking the majority of respondents from the University were lecturers, students, and librarians whereas the

particular figure was an archetypal representative of the intermediate group sketched above. One parent, in this case his mother, was a petty trader and peasant farmer. The other, his father, had a semi-skilled working class position, in this case, that of a driver. He himself works as a contracted engineer, drilling boreholes for water on a freelance basis, but was clearly reliant on the accumulation of educational capital. From an original position as a 'civil servant' his trajectory was marked by an itinerary of institutionally guaranteed certificates, often gained by correspondence:

R: I have several Diplomas (3 of them) and I am doing a Distance Programme in Law with the Universities of Abjua and Calabar.

Most notably, his favourite author was D. H. Lawrence. Asked whether he had read much Nigerian fiction he commented:

R: Yes, but I don't like majority of them, because the authors do not work hard enough to produce quality stories.

This response marks the point at which Bourdieu's thesis cannot, tailored as it is to a European national culture, completely sustain an analysis of the reception of fiction in the Nigerian context. Where in Bourdieu the key axis of distinction is laid between the accessible and the non-accessible work of culture, the popular and the consecrated,²⁶ the neo-colonial context impresses upon the situation a second axis: the distinction between the African and the Western text. Importantly, this division is not just a property of the reader who, as in this case, lays claim to an enlightened position. It occurs equally in relation to more popular forms so that the ubiquitous names of James Hadley Chase, Sheldon, Steele, Robbins, Clancey, Ludlum and Archer were continually proffered by respondents who, when asked if they read Nigerian

guesthouse tended to be the passing residence of businessmen, high level churchmen, and professionals staying in Jos for conferences and seminars. It doesn't need to be added, of course, that the two groups define themselves as members of the *same* broad class by virtue of answering the questions on reading, even where this was largely in negative terms. In both the University and the guesthouse, those who worked as porters, security and cleaners also answered the questionnaires. With a few exceptions they left the questions on reading unanswered.

²⁶ This is, of course, not the limit of Bourdieu's discussion, there any number of further discriminations such as that existing between the avant-garde and the canonised work.

equivalents in the same genres - Eddie Iroh, for example - refused to accept that Nigerian authors would produce comparable material.²⁷ So, a student whose favourite authors were Grisham, Archer and Ludlum, was typical in saying of Nigerian fiction:

R: I can't speak for most Nigerians, but for me it isn't too important.

Or similarly, the response of another young male, manual worker:

Q: Have you read much *Nigerian fiction*?

R: Not much.

Q: What are (or were) your reasons for doing so?

R: They look feck [fake?] / artificial.

Bourdieu continually points out how a specific faultline of distinction is valued in inverted ways by those on either side, so that petit-bourgeois ostentation appears to the working class as pretentious, while the working classes' functional approach to taste appears, in the eyes of the petit-bourgeoisie, as evidence of an irresolvable baseness. The same pattern appears here. We have already seen how, from a position that we might describe loosely as cultural nationalist, it is precisely the non-Western text that is privileged.

R: This [Nigerian literature] is a great important because we will learn a lot on how things happen *here in Nigeria*.

(Male, 21-35, clerical worker, M: civil servant, F: soldier).

[...] Q: What are (or were) your reasons for [reading African fiction]?

R2: They inform us on our cultures and traditions and how the Europeans exploited Nigerians.

(Male, 21-35, sales manager, housewife, F: soldier).

At the same time, the distinction between accessibility and inaccessibility, the popular and the restricted was also in evidence, and was distinct from the Western-African division. The poles in this case are marked by two groups of respondents. Firstly, those for whom good stories were distinguished by their openness:

²⁷ Particularly among younger readers, and particularly among those who had been educated in missionary run schools, this attitude had its currency. But the popularity of these American and British writers of pulp thrillers and romances was fairly established. Among all respondents asked to name favourite authors and books, only 14 names occurred more than twice: Robert Ludlum, Chuck Swindoll (a Christian evangelical writer), Martina Cole (3 occurrences); John Grisham, Harrold Robbins, Ken Saro-Wiwa (4); Shakespeare, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ola Rotimi (5); Sidney Sheldon, Jeffery Archer (6); Hadley Chase (7); Wole Soyinka (12); Chinua Achebe (25).

R: The fact that it meant for all levels of readers to understand.
(Female, 36-50, housewife (?), M: trader, F: farmer).²⁸

And secondly, by those for whom good writing demanded a taxing engagement:

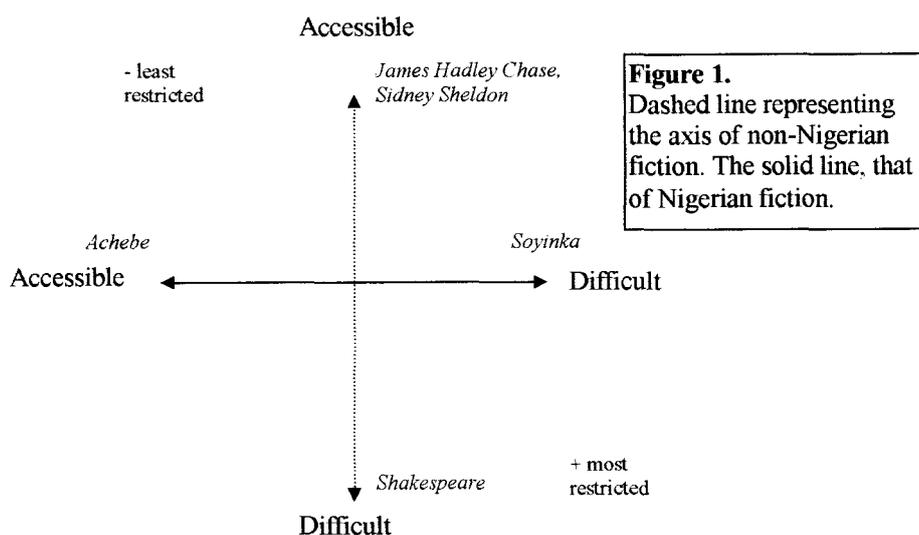
R: A beautiful plot, where you can't predict what will happen next, interesting flashbacks and a good storyline. using your head to read and really thinking.
(Female, 21-35, student, M: beautician, F: engineer)

In particular, this distinction was given its typographic figures in the differentiation of Achebe from Soyinka, simple writing from 'big grammar'. Attending the meeting of the Association of Nigerian Authors in Jos, the debate between an 'accessible style' and a more exclusive, self-referential aesthetic, raged on and off for the entire three hours of the gathering. It crystallised around the texts of two members of the group. At the pole of accessibility stood the epistolary poetry of a young man who argued passionately against the use of 'long grammar' and whose work - *From A Heart Of Harmattan* - fitted his prescription. Against this stood the more deliberately elusive *Indigenes of Nowhere*, a long poem of urban angst that was, in line with Bourdieu's theory of homology, semantically and formally restrictive but also socially critical.²⁹ The debate was clearly a live concern among the gathered writers, already fundamentally distinguished by their having the time and material means to write. More than once it was referenced in terms of the iconic figures of Achebe and Soyinka, the accessible and the elusive.

²⁸ The question being asked is: What do you think makes a good story?

²⁹ Again, the situation in Nigeria is not isomorphic with the one Bourdieu describes. A number of authors argued passionately that the demand that African fiction should be socially concerned had become a dominant prescription to the extent of destroying the (proper) individual focus and more personal concerns of genuine writing. In something like an inversion of debates within western literary theory, the argument was made - if only for the strategic reason that emergent forms always have symbolic cachet - that it was time to recover the subdued but true vocation of art: i.e. expression of the individual, private, psychological as opposed to the social, political, public.

The question that raises itself is how these two axes of distinction, African vs. Western and accessible vs. non-accessible, might map together. We could try initially to give them some form of graphic representation along the lines below.³⁰



This attempted mapping, however, fails because the relationship between the two scales is substantially more complicated than can be graphically represented, and alters in the responses of different readers. Let me offer two examples from the expatriate interviews to demonstrate.

A: Who, what kind of stuff would you read?

R: Up to 1996, for instance, I think I had read everything written by Jeffrey Archer, Sidney Sheldon, you know...

A: Right, right, thrillers?

R: Yeah. Things like that, quite a lot of that, that generation of authors and books.

A: James Hadley Chase?

³⁰ Having Achebe as the marker of the most accessible pole is a mistake, but one which represents the position of respondents. It reflects the fact that Nigerian writers in 'popular' genres - thrillers, detective novels, murder stories - such as Eddie Iroh - are still largely reliant on the same restricted distribution mechanisms as those writers with the most inaccessible style. (Both are figures on the Heinemann list). Equally, local publishers of popular or middle-brow writing, such as series by Spectrum (e.g. Tayo Johnson, Segun Okunoren) or Saros (e.g. Maxwell Nwagboso) or even Heinemann's own Frontline Series (e.g. Tony Marinho) simply do not have the audience that a place in the school curriculum guarantees for Achebe, or that the lure of Americana secures for Grisham. Genuinely popular forms of writing such as the market literature discussed in relation to Onitsha, have not, at least as far as I could ascertain in Plateau state, developed a national form. It is definitely arguable that this gap at the pole of popular literature has been filled by the video film industry whose prevalence and popularity dwarfs that of almost any comparable novel, but whose greater accessibility immediately diminishes its value as symbolic capital as against written fiction of almost any sort. See Barber, 1997; Larkin, 1997; Lawuyi, 1997; Haynes and Okome, 1998 for examples of the emergent critical discussion of popular video productions.

R: That was in my first year in the secondary school, late primary school, early secondary school, yeah, sure.

A: So who, who would you call your favourite author?

R: As my favourite. Now, *we have to classify* the author now, ok, fiction and general entertainment I probably... [...] I like, I like Sidney Sheldon a lot. [...] Yeah, Jeffrey Archer, I like Jeffrey Archer a lot.

A: But you said that'd be fiction, general entertainment, what was, where were you going to...

R: Now, you, I'd also want to talk about, you know, something like Nigerian novels, for instance, somebody like Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. You know? They relate to a life I can almost imagine, I mean, I look back to maybe probably before I was born, you know, trying to draw a parallel from the life of the people, who are older than me and maybe stretch it fifty, sixty years back and begin to imagine what they were living like and then look at it in the light of Chinua Achebe's writings for instance, you know, and he seems to, he seems to bring to life a life that existed fifty years before I was born, you know, this... so in that, that sense you would find something like probably a mixture of fact and fiction. You know.

(Male: 21-35, microbiologist, M: trader, F: farmer).

[separate interview]

R: I like Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, that's about one novel I can read more than 10 times. It's so nice. [...] Yeah, I like that book. I read it in school. I didn't find it boring (?). But Wole Soyinka is like, he has this big grammar [...] sometimes like, it's ok you read this sometimes they have this, maybe he wants to show he has... anyway he want to look better for (?) his Nobel prize anyway. [...] I prefer Chinua Achebe anytime. [...] And then I read *Ake* and *Kongi's Harvest*.

A: I've not read that, is it good?

R: Yeah, it's just talking about his childhood and remembering. And *Kongi's Harvest*, I forget the theme (?) I read the book but now I don't know what it's all about. [...] He's the guy from the South, but (?) I don't realise why the Europeans like him, his writing is so abstract., he's not like Chinua Achebe that will tell you what is happening in the society, I mean he gives an idea what's happening in the east. [...] Those are the African writers I can say I have read a bit anyway. But then [...] let's say I prefer Sidney Sheldon.

(Female, 21-35, student, M: student, F: businessman).

In this second example, Soyinka's abstraction is equated by the reader to a westernisation, whereas the accessibility of Achebe is paralleled with that of Sheldon. For the former reader, however, it is a line drawn specifically *between* Sheldon and Achebe that marks out the division between entertainment and serious reading. In this case the distinction appears almost isomorphic with that between Western and Nigerian fiction. It is not a surprise then that the former reader goes on to talk about Soyinka as a iconic figure on the non-entertainment side of the classification they have made.

R: I read, I read well, *The Man Died*, yeah, sure I read, of course, everybody reads that, you know...

A: I haven't read it.

R: Well, you are not Nigerian anyway...

For the second reader Soyinka's inaccessibility is related to Westernisation - 'why the Europeans like him, his writing is so abstract' - and for the former reader to the very opposite, a figure of Nigerian cultural distinction - 'everybody reads that you know.' There is no obvious way of mapping this, but I would suggest that an explanation might lie in the comment from Gramsci cited in the preceding chapter, and the failure, as Fanon predicted, of the African middle classes to develop a coherent national hegemony over and against, in the first instance, the historical imposition of legitimate culture by colonialism and, in the second, the contemporary marketing of cultural artefacts by Western companies. More importantly, as Karin Barber has argued, the unmappable cultural space that is at issue here, *is* unmappable precisely because it is overdetermined:

The predominance of the categories 'traditional' and 'elite' ('Westernized' / 'modern') in foreign perceptions of African culture – and especially in the fields of visual art and literature – arose in conditions defined by the extension of global capitalism on the one hand and the assertion of cultural nationalism by African elites on the other. (1997a, 1; see also, more extensively, 1987)

For Barber, who has been instrumental in moving the focus of African cultural studies towards the realm of popular production, this disciplinary shift is important precisely because it escapes the sterile 'traditional / modern' duality, given 'spurious solidity' (1) by its continual (and conflicting) overuse.

The contradiction is posed more starkly and, for a thesis on migrancy, in a more relevant way by this juxtaposition of quotes, all of which are responses to questions asking 'who are your favourite writers' and 'why do you like these':

R: James Hadley Chase, Harrold Robin[s]

R: Because they make you to really know about the world and how to go about living in it.

(Female, 21-35, library assistant, M: business woman, F: military officer).

R: Harold Robins, James Hadley Chase, Agatha Christie

R: Because they are about *reality*[.]
(Female, under 21, student, M: lecturer, F: doctor).

R: African Writers Series
R: They always bring their story *home*.
(Female, 36-50, not given, M: trader, F: soldier).

R: James Ngugi, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Mongo Beti, Elechi Amadi, Ayi Kwei Armah, John Munonye etc.
R: Their writings have pure African setting [...] they bring me nearer *home*.
(Male, 36-50, civil servant, M: farmer, F: farmer).

The question of how and when the reader feels ‘at home’ in a novel, or whether or not it deals with what they understand as reality is the issue here. The complexity of the problem, as Appadurai argues, is related to the increasing (often mass mediated) migrancy of cultural products which become resources for imagining alternative lives situated elsewhere. Perhaps more than Appadurai, however, I would want to emphasise that the disjunctions thus created between expected and experienced reality can be hugely detrimental to everything except the continuity of a system of exploitation. Tied into the dialectic of probabilities and aspirations discussed in chapter four, the economy of fantasy on which the readership of western novels may be based creates a disaffection without militancy or potential for change. It is, in this respect, the converse side of that repeatedly asserted ‘tradition’ which the local elites put to ideological work in FESTAC and other contexts. If, for their part, Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins write about ‘reality’ then the Nigerian reader of these novels is placed in the placid position of having to wait for that post-migration ‘real life’ to begin.

If this section has taken us somewhat away from the topic in hand, it has done so primarily to demonstrate the existence of strategies of social classification, and the use of literature as marker. In the words of the interviewee cited above: ‘we have to classify’. His statement in relation to *The Man Died* goes on to make clear (‘everybody reads that’) how the reception of texts is at least one means of making

that classification. That final statement, in fact, summarises well what I hope this section has demonstrated. Made in interview, the assertion that *The Man Died* is read by *everybody*, was poised against me, the interviewer, as a statement of patrimony, in just the way that I have argued novel fiction can be employed: as co-ordinate of identity. At the same time, it cannot be forgotten that this claim becomes something very different at a class level within the national population itself. If *everybody* reads a particular novel, the statement of the compound sweeper cited early - 'I don't read novels [...] because I have no time for reading them.' - condemns him, as Bourdieu says, to a kind of non-being.

Nigerian readers and *Consider the Lilies*.

This final section amplifies some of the points just made. It looks at the reception of a Scottish novel, Iain Crichton Smith's *Consider the Lilies* (1968), among a group of Nigerian readers. The group, in this case, consisted primarily of lecturers and postgraduate students from the department of English, University of Jos. They represented, therefore, that section of the elite for whom the distinction accruing from ownership of high levels of cultural capital is constitutive of their social position.³¹

Consider the Lilies bears more than a passing comparison with *Things Fall Apart*. It deals with the enforced eviction of a rural population from their traditional inland residence to the coast in order to provide ground for the rearing of sheep on behalf of a feudal landowner. In this respect, although the situation is not directly a colonial one, the dynamics of power involved are not dissimilar to those given

³¹ To contextualise however: the wage-levels for lecturing staff in the federal universities in Nigeria have been extremely low. It is not uncommon, and is often wholly necessary for academic staff to hold secondary positions outside of the university, often in work such as driving taxis, or the carrying out of small scale trading or the rearing of livestock for sale.

fictional treatment by Achebe. Furthermore, the central protagonist of the novel, Mrs. Scott, is reminiscent of Okonkwo in a number of ways: in her initially strict adherence to the established social and religious order, in her estrangement from her son, and in her final defiance of authority. Beyond these similarities in the dramas that are staged by Crichton Smith and Achebe, both writers faced questions over the use of English and came to similar conclusions. Crichton Smith's words on the subject might easily have been Achebe's own:

There are various ways in which this problem of language could have been tackled (since, after all, the old woman and most of the characters would be Gaelic-speaking). I could have created a language [...] highly stylised and, in my view, artificial. [...] I decided on balance the best thing to do would be to use a simple English. (*Consider the Lilies*, v-vi)

Finally, like Achebe, much of Crichton Smith's vehemence in his novel is directed not against the tertiary figure of power - here the Duke of Sutherland - but against the intermediary agent, in this case the Duke's factor, Patrick Sellar.³² Having said all this, *Consider the Lilies* is a distinctly Scottish novel and the history on which it draws, the Sutherland setting, the cultural references to the Protestant tradition, indeed, its position within the tradition of rural Scottish fiction are all irreducible. In a paradoxical sense, what it *most* shares with Achebe is this construction of a sense of locality which, tying in with the novel's explicit thematic concerns (the resistance to an alienation from the land) becomes part of the novel's ideological angle.

³² Other similarities might be added, including the use of oral devices for narration - rumour, gossip, story, recounted memory - and the fact that structurally both novels have an outward journey at the centre, the outcome of which determines much of the conclusion of the book. Okonkwo's follows his banishment in the second section of *Things Fall Apart*, in *Consider the Lilies* it is Mrs. Scott's walk to meet the minister to solicit help against the eviction. It is when the church fails her that she becomes closer to the atheist and radical of the novel, Donald Macleod. Unlike the conclusion of *Things Fall Apart*, however, Mrs. Scott remains in her house at the end of the novel having rejected both the offer of a pension as incentive to move from the landowner, and the offer of a residence with Macleod. It is a less distinct finale than Achebe's, but driven by a similar defiance and independence in the face of authority.

My analysis here is limited by space and so I want to focus on only one aspect of its reception, associated with the primary, most immediate reaction to the novel on the part of these readers. In trying to recuperate the idea of imaginative knowledge in the previous chapter, I noted that a recurring experience for many Scottish readers starting out on Achebe's writing was an initial feeling of dislocation. Put in other words, an inability to site themselves in their engagement with the text, a lack of cultural reference points by which they could determine sympathies or even construct a 'reading', in the most direct sense of constellating the movement and logic of the narrative. Nor was this, I should add, simply a function of the fact that the majority of the readers in this case were working class and thus had less access to the vicarious cosmopolitan encounters that might be associated with higher levels of cultural capital, although in some cases there may have been a compounding effect in this sense. Nevertheless, in the reading group run in Fife, where all the readers were middle-class and were familiar with at least the canonised texts of legitimate culture, and to an extent, avant-garde writing as well, most respondents to *Things Fall Apart* opened their reactions with statements about never having read 'anything like it' before, explaining that the book was initially difficult to 'crack', 'hard to get into.' These are revealing phrases inasmuch as they expose the readers' engagement with the novel as a relationship of decoding.

I return to this point because the reception of *Consider the Lilies* by these Nigerian readers was completely different.

R: When I first of all read the book *Consider the Lilies*, I started thinking that 'are we really in Nigeria?' Because it has a perception of things Nigerians have. You know, the particular place, the particular time[.]

R2: I'd like to add that actually when I read the novel my first impression about the setting was, it's Africa.

R3: [W]hen I come to consider the setting (?) it's really Africa, oppression of the underprivileged by the privileged or by the feudalists [...] So, I think it's actually Nigerian. (laughter).

R4: In fact, as i read the book, i had to keep reminding myself that the story took place in Scotland and not somewhere in Africa.³³

Notice, these include statements of *initial* reaction - ‘first of all’, ‘my first impression’. They are the inverse of the first reactions of many Scottish readers to *Things Fall Apart*. This is clearly not an insignificant difference, but it is a puzzling one. *Later* in their responses the readers of *Consider the Lilies* talked more specifically about what they felt were reminiscent aspects of the novel:

R: [T]here’s a close parallelism between what I have heard in that novel and contemporary Africa. [...] And in the relationship of the husband, you know, the position of the husband and wife [...and...] this alliance of church and state[.]

R2: From what I’ve seen, I compare the situation in that novel with what happens in many parts of Africa. [...] I could see what is happening today in Nigeria in particular this issue of migrating to, to seek greener pastures, this thing was also very common there as we could see Iain going to Canada and so forth[.]

R3: The language as I said is simple and there are a lot of traditional, oral tradition. I noticed also the use of proverbs and then moonlight gatherings and storytellings (?) and then the communal life.

R4: [W]hen the author is describing the thing I just saw it as this traditional attachment to the village that our people, even if you give some of them the whole world (?) they’ll not leave their village and come to the city[.]

These ‘parallelisms’ of the content of the non-local novel with what is immediately familiar in another context demonstrate something about the translational nature of reading. But we have already seen the parallel process among readers in Stranraer who talked about the village marketplace, presented in Achebe, as operating on a ‘supermarket principle’. In the same way in this case, a Nigerian reader describes Crichton Smith’s image of a late-night ceilidh as ‘moonlight gatherings and storytellings.’ It seems to me, therefore, that these *later* acts of comparison are *not* sufficient to explain that initial claim to familiarity, the statement of primary recognition, that these readers expressed and which Scottish readers, in the opposite context, did not. The similarities that both sets of readers discovered in these two different ‘migrant’ novels, similarities with their own local experience, are *subsequent* effects. Given the closeness of the subject matter of the two works outlined above, it

³³ What is significant about this last (written) response is that it was made not by a lecturer but by a

is not a surprising reaction. The first inclination, however, the initial angle from which they approached the respective novels are strikingly opposed.

Spivak uses a term that may be apposite in this regard: ‘sanctioned ignorance’ or elsewhere, ‘sanctioned inattention’. The phrase takes on an altering role as it makes its entrance on the various stages of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) and relates back to her earlier discussion of ‘foreclosure’ (e.g. 1990, chapter 9).³⁴ At least as I understand her usage, its primary reference is to the limits by which Western critical enquiry constitutes its project. This means different things in different places - a failure to question the restrictions on Kant’s definition of the human, a criticism which recognises a racial lineament of domination but not a gendered one (or vice-versa), as in her discussion of sati, or the reduction whereby elite expatriates are licensed as the sole legitimate representatives of a third world perspective. Fundamentally, sanctioned ignorance is her name for the failure of western critical and cultural practices to interrogate themselves and recognise the fact of their own nescience.

What is at play [...] is a phenomenon that can be called ‘sanctioned ignorance,’ now sanctioned more than ever by an invocation of ‘globality’ - a word serving to hide the financialization of the globe, or ‘hybridity’ - a word serving to obliterate the irreducible hybridity of all language. (1999, 164)

It is also, I suggest, a form of sanctioned ignorance that inflects the encounters between British readers and *Things Fall Apart* at the first. To repeat a quote partially given at an earlier point:

R: I must admit, that my initial reaction on seeing the book, was a sinking feeling. I felt, that of all the books chosen, that was the one, I really had no inclination whatsoever to read. It may sound insular, but I am not interested in Africa, and when

departmental secretary, who chose not to attend the discussion group precisely because she felt unwilling to contribute in the company of more ‘legitimate’ commentators on literature.

³⁴ Spivak uses foreclosure to describe the way in which various types of cultural investigation constitute a single axis of analysis as solely determining, thus allowing other forms of discrimination to go unexamined.

I choose books in the library, I steer clear of anything about [...] Africa. So very reluctantly I started to read it, it was hard going!
(Female, over 65, ex-housewife and voluntary worker, M: not given, F: vet).

What this formula speaks of, and the quote is useful because it puts starkly what other readers put more politely, is the fact that to be able to have no knowledge of a particular subject - to have a sanctioned ignorance - is to tacitly display one's power over that subject. This, of course, is Spivak's point and why she demands that Western epistemologies drag their hidden limits into the light, for in so doing they expose their entanglements with power relations. This also, therefore, is a form of distinction. Although in Bourdieu esoteric knowledge (that which is not of practices directly related to the instrumental questions of survival) acts as an objective marker of material comfort, this implies a kind of dialectical correlate whereby what is also being expressed is a relation of ignorance. Millionaires are not required to know the price of a pint of milk. That which you know you can comfortably afford, you can comfortably afford not to know.

The inversion here is the fact that sanctioned ignorance is a claim to complete knowledge. Hence readers in the Fife group, referred to above, agreed almost unanimously with one respondent who described the novel as striking her, initially, as 'like a child's story'. This claim seems to sit poorly with the statements by members of the same group that the book was, at the first, hard to understand. In fact, the apparent paradox fixes exactly this relation of sanctioned ignorance that Spivak discusses, where a nescient position, a position of non-knowledge, passes itself off as the elevated disinterest of the already knowledgeable. British readers do not read about Nigeria because this knowledge has symbolic value only as an esoteric academic exercise (as in this thesis). At the same time, the ideological promotion of British cultural self-sufficiency, i.e. that the national canon *is* culture per se, means that this very ignorance appears as its opposite, a distinction of knowledge.

Contrastingly, later in the discussion in Jos, one of the participants, a librarian who had studied in Wales, volunteered her experience overseas.

R: I found out that in Britain quite a lot of people don't read round like average Nigerians, you know, we pick up a lot of books in school, we read about Scotland, read about Australia, you even learn the geography. [...] I remember one day in class a classmate of mine was asking me if Nigeria was in South Africa. You know? (laughter) And being a Nigerian I felt very embarrassed. She was British you know, and, if she was somebody from somewhere else I would have just looked at her. But I said, beg your pardon, so (?) she became very sort of sheepish, you mean you've never heard about Nigeria, so I found out that in Britain quite a number of people don't read facts, they just read, you see, within their locality, you know their immediate locality, but in Nigeria [...] I found out that Nigerians, we can read about other people[.]

Sender and Smith have made the dubious argument, against the position of underdevelopment theorists like Rodney, that the fact that African nations will industrialise relatively later than their European counterparts gives them a positive advantage for expansion.³⁵ It is certainly not my intention to make a parallel version of that thesis in the sphere of culture, but we do need to recognise a paradoxical result of imperialism and of the discourses it brought forth. Although it creates problems in *Orientalism*, there is a powerful point to Said's insistence that what Orientalism was fundamentally constructing was a sanctioned but enabling ignorance. On the other hand, the imposition of a Eurocentric education system historically, and the infiltration of Western media networks contemporarily, from CNN to the BBC World Service, allied to the whole distorted directionality of the market, does mean that Nigerian subjects, particularly middle-class subjects, have an enforced (or at least, encouraged) familiarity with an image of the West. The reading of Western pulp fiction is obviously part of this.

³⁵ '[N]on-industrialised economies in the C20th have had the immense advantage of undertaking industrialisation in a world in which technologically sophisticated and industrialised economies had already established their positions. The industrialised economies therefore constituted a potential source of the material means for late industrialisers to 'catch up'.' (1986, 71) It hardly needs to be added how globalisation has exposed the untenable nature of this position.

In a sense, then, sanctioned ignorance and necessary knowledge are sides of the one coin, and in the ideology of development particularly this becomes clear: the developed world knows the developing world the way an adult knows their childhood.

At least one of the readers in the Jos group took up just this terminology:

R: Maybe we've read so much about the West, and we know their culture so, reading this novel it doesn't sound strange to us at all, we know that they were also, that was one life mainly centred in the villages and so forth and even going (?) to big cities like that Edinburgh was something really exciting for people, so we knew, we knew that because we are passing through a similar stage, all these things are the things we are actually watching in villages now, happening, we have experienced them. And so forth. So it's not strange, we don't feel alienated.

Importantly, there is a truth in what this reader says. Beyond the pejorative rhetoric of social evolution, whose mapping of experience onto a necessary timescale reconfirms the west in its perceived maturity and reinserts the non-west into a position of national childhood, it is true that *Consider the Lilies* and *Things Fall Apart* tell stories of similar historical experience. The apparent familiarity of the narrative of *Consider the Lilies* as commented upon by these readers is noteworthy for the same reason as the sympathy towards Okonkwo on behalf of working class Scottish readers was noteworthy: it reveals a sense of homologous experience. Historically speaking there are, as already said, very genuine differences between the dispossession enacted in the clearances and the regime of extraction installed under forms of indirect rule in Nigeria. But again, pointing out that these historical processes are not directly comparable would miss the fact that their presentation, mediated by narrative fiction, does offer a sense that there are certain continuities between the structures of power operating in different historical contexts. At the same time, however, I am arguing that Fredric Jameson's comment that 'third world' novels strike the *Western reader* as 'already-read' (1986, 66) is misleading. Jameson's justification for this comment is not, of course, a simple evolutionary aggrandisement but nevertheless, the finding of

my research suggests that African readers encountering non-African fiction feel much more *immediately* a sense of the ‘already-read’ than in the reverse case.

Conclusion.

In the section above, as well as in all the preceding and relatively free-standing sections making up this chapter, conclusions have been tentative rather than fully developed. I cannot fully make good that absence here, but it is worth noting that Antonio Gramsci offers a number of ways of approaching and perhaps bringing into conjunction the various questions of reading broached. Let me offer an act of deliberate bricolage:

[O]ne should speak of a struggle for a ‘new culture’ and not for a ‘new art’ [...] that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality and, therefore, a world intimately ingrained in ‘possible artists’ and ‘possible works of art’. [...] The Italian people are the people with the greatest ‘national’ interest in a modern form of cosmopolitanism [...] [so as to] collaborate in rebuilding the world in an economically unified way not in order to dominate it hegemonically and appropriate the fruit of others’ labour but to exist and develop precisely as the Italian people. [...] What is the meaning of the fact that the Italian people prefer to read foreign writers? It means that they *undergo* the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals [...] the public seeks ‘its’ literature abroad because it feels that this literature is more ‘its own’ than the so-called national literature [...] Every people has its own literature, but this can come to it from another people, in other words the people in question can be subordinated to the intellectual and moral hegemony of other peoples [...] [B]ourgeois thought which does not want to lose its hegemony over the popular classes [...] to exercise this hegemony better, accommodates part of proletarian ideology [...this is...] how a social impulse, tending towards one end, brings about its opposite.³⁶

It is clear in Gramsci that acts of cultural production are significant to individuals, and, in as much as this significance is a shared feeling, become part of that which

³⁶ All selections are from a prior selection of writings: (Gramsci, 1985: 98, 247, 209, 255, 363-4).

defines membership of the group (a literature which is 'its own'). This fact by itself is neither positive nor negative but simply an aspect of human social life. Hence literature can act as a popular 'narcotic' or 'opium' when, for example, the readers of the adventure novel feel the satisfaction of justice served against the powerful, even while the system precludes them access to such justice on their own behalf (346-8; 370-4). Gramsci was too aware of the recuperative possibilities of a mass turn in cultural production, as the last sentence suggests and as Adorno would later argue, to crudely associate the 'popular' with the populist. A new art emerges, he insists, not as the result of formal radicalism (we might remember his scathing comments on futurism as the whooping of catholic school-boys briefly escaped to a nearby wood³⁷) but in the struggle for a new life in the sense of a fight against incumbent exploitative relations. This, in many ways, is the argument I intended to make in relation to the Nigerian readers of *Things Fall Apart*, whose claims that the book was in some sense theirs operated on different levels, sometimes as 'mere evocative propaganda' (253), but often as an assertion against what they considered an on-going denigration. Hegemony is such a valuable critical term not simply because it recognises the existence of 'a cultural front as necessary alongside the merely economic and political ones' (106) but because it means nothing without context: what type of hegemony, whose hegemony? We have seen above Nigerian literature claimed both by those 'restricted groups that act as if the life of the nation were in their hands' (254). We have also seen those for whom its relevance is as a stake in the contemporary struggle against Western cultural dominance. Culture in the most restricted, most *distinct* sense

³⁷ This sense that formal radicalism was not enough, that a new art was insufficient if it did not derive from a new culture, relates to what Bourdieu has written of post-structuralism: that it gives the appearance of radicalism, but in its ludic, multiply referential approach to texts, reveals how much its disregard for formal rules is an act of heresy whose fall-out affects only those in the inner-sanctum of the academic humanities.

(i.e. bearing distinction) versus culture in the broadest, popular sense. Hegemony as imposition, hegemony as emergent force.

The argument made in relation to the ‘hinge of hegemony’ is that some non-Igbo Nigerian readers were able to associate with the book not only by recognising direct parallels, nor by simply invoking it as a sign of national culture where ‘difference returns as the same’, but by the fragile tactic of seeing in the specificity of a cultural order threatened from the outside a parallel with historical experience from their own particular locality. This, it might be noted, is also Gramsci’s tactic in the above, where a genuine cosmopolitanism, grounded in the national-popular culture, is opposed to that spurious cosmopolitanism of imperialist expansion and that equally misguided cosmopolitanism which derives from a national subordination to the hegemony of another country. Hence for Gramsci the national-popular is to a real cosmopolitanism what chauvinist nationalism is to a spurious global unity based in exploitation. It is the specificity of the popular struggle (‘precisely as the Italian people’) which is prerequisite for genuine cosmopolitanism. This argument is, it seems to me, not unlike that made by the readers cited last in the second section above, although Gramsci’s position is explicit in assuming as precondition, after Marx, a fundamental change in the basic social relations obtaining in the world. Globalisation, to repeat, is a poor parody of human unity.

It is in the uncertain interstice between this relation to local literature on the one hand and the repercussions of a colonially installed British cultural hegemony on the other (and, increasingly important, the market dominance of American culture) that complex negotiations of distinction are produced, as were discussed in section three. While there are Nigerian writers whose work apes American genre models in a straightforward and undisguised manner, there is also that more paradoxical position

of a nationalism that asserts itself aggressively, and whose assertion is directly related to *preventing* the realisation of genuine popular-nationalism: those who ‘persist in exalting the nation so as not to feel the oppressive weight of the [foreign] hegemony on which they depend.’ (255) In this respect Gramsci’s closeness to Fanon is clear, despite the gap that divides them historically and geographically. In particular, his relation to Fanon’s discussion of the comprador classes, for whom a rigorous and vocal nationalist rhetoric is the very means to ensure their continued tenure of positions which make national development impossible and which guarantee the ongoing mortgaging of that which the independence struggle might have achieved. At the same time, Gramsci’s bemoaning of the failure of the Italian bourgeoisie to create any coherent sense of national culture parallels Fanon’s fears over the failure of the African middle-classes to create a coherent ideology. In both cases, and particularly in the context of the mass media transmission of images of the elsewhere, there is subordination to the hegemony of other cultural systems. It is in the confused space of an asserted but not fully present national hegemony that we get such conflicting readings as Soyinka the inaccessible, western style writer *and* Soyinka the Nigerian cultural nationalist.³⁸

The emphasis on the reception of what I have termed ‘migrant fiction’ in the final section of this chapter and the majority of the last, brings to the front of the stage

³⁸ There is not space to give it the discussion it warrants, but Canclini’s chapter on ‘modernism without modernization’ (1995, 41-65) is absolutely relevant here. In this brief section of a wider work Canclini works at the puzzle of what kind of modernist art movement can come to exist in the context of under-development and its subsequent limited reading public. That is to say, where there are not the conditions for a fully ‘autonomous cultural field’ (47, culture having in this case its limited European literary sense). His chapter focuses not on the reception of the texts, but on the contradictory position into which avant-garde art movements in Latin America are placed, caught between an attempt to avoid the hegemonic models of Western practice [i.e. actively seeking to engage rather than disengage with social movements] and the structural position they inhabit, which makes local communication problematic. In this case reception abroad is filtered through the international market for symbolic goods so that aesthetic innovation is converted ‘into a game’ (64) in which the tang of ‘authenticity’ is the only chip these artists have to cash at the table. Canclini’s discussion focuses on the quandaries of production which mirror the quandaries of reception looked at in this chapter.

the engagements of readers with literature from a cultural order which is at least not wholly their own. On the one hand this suggests the hopeful possibility of fiction revealing comparable historical experience beyond, for example, a racist naturalisation of inequality:

R: So when I was reading the book [*Consider the Lilies*] I was not really happy, I was asking how can a white man now colonise another white man?

On the other hand, in as much as migrant fiction feeds into an economy of fantasy for the elsewhere, it may threaten to preclude that aspect of culture which was to Gramsci, and later to Fanon, irreducible: local culture critiquing the history of local power relations for local readers. If the hinge of hegemony (hegemony in Gramsci's broadest sense, popular and inclusive rather than imposed) can work by asserting the fact that all local struggles against oppression are homologous, as was argued above, there is no reason why this tactic might not be extended beyond the limitations of the national context. In this respect we might hope that the reception of migrant fiction, where that fiction is a record of local struggle, may offer us the first threads of a genuine cosmopolitanism. Or, what is increasingly the same thing, links by which the ersatz cosmopolitanism of global capital and its local agents can be resisted.

R: I wanted to add that this particular novel treats a theme that is similar to a Nigerian playwright Tunde Fatunde,³⁹ it's a pidgin title *No Food, No Country*. This is based on the bacchanalian episode in Sokoto during the second republic. Just the same the emir, along with some Western multinationals came and took over the land belonging to the people and displaced them and the people were there and they fought, fought back. What happens in the play is different, at the end it is different because the farmers actually stood up and fought against the establishment and imprisoned all those people who had connived with the multinationals, the emir and other people to take away their land.

³⁹ See Enenche (1988, 185-194) for a short discussion of Fatunde's 'agit-prop' theatre including this play.

Conclusion: Fictions and Migrancy.

My intention in this conclusion is not to add further material to an already overlaid theoretical framework, but instead to summarise my arguments and to seek to demonstrate the coherent position linking the discussions within the various chapters. The dual question that has been in the foreground of everything presented here is that of migrancy and narrative, the relation between these two capacities of human beings: travel and story-telling. It is a conjunction which is in no sense original, as will already be clear, and so the questions I have been forced to consider, e.g. those of agency and determinism, identity and biography, are all topics well rehearsed in social theory, in anthropology, in literary criticism and so forth. As a result the arguments running through this thesis have something of the quality of bricolage. Usefully compounding this is the fact that I have engaged with the theoretical writing of Nigerian critics such as Osofisan and Onoge as well as those cross-disciplinary presences more familiar in the Western academy.

My first position-taking here is a sceptical and oppositional one. That is to say, an attempt to demonstrate that much of what goes under the rubric 'postcolonial theory', despite the apparent novelty of this body of work, has an unremarked inheritance from the cultural and artistic thinking of the most familiar advocates of romanticism. The lineage is discernible particularly, I have argued, in two linked tendencies: the primacy allocated to the imagination in social life and the valorisation of the figure of the migrant, especially the migrant artist or intellectual. The increasingly de-materialised analysis of cultural products and the assertion that identity is increasingly de-linked from specific territory therefore converge to find

neat figuration in this much summoned ideal type. There is an unspoken but impelling logic which makes it entirely appropriate for Ulf Hannerz to say:

To become acquainted to more cultures is to turn into an *aficionado*, to view them as art works. (1990, 239)

The logic, as he himself proceeds to point out, lies in the 'affinity between cosmopolitanism and the culture of intellectuals.' (246) Similarly, Arjun Appadurai, one of the central proponents of the position that identity is being deterritorialized, and a key theoriser of the migrancy of cultural products, argues in the opening salvoes of a crucial essay:

[T]he imagination in the postelectronic world plays a newly significant role [...] [It is] the wellspring of the increased rates of migration at every level of social, national, and global life. (Appadurai, 1996, 5-6)

In the background of this phrase, I would suggest, we can just about discern Wordsworth's own proposition:

[T]he power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes [...] as might appear almost miraculous. (1979 [1805], 43)

Two things are pointed out in relation to this current critical dispensation. The first is that we have to understand the increasing 'cultural turn' in social theory in the context of the correspondent 'cultural turn' in commodity production. That is to say the increasing importance of imaginary and symbolic aspects of commodities in their design, production and sale. As is detailed more closely in chapter five, it seems to me an absolute mistake to accept this fetishisation of the imaginary on its own terms, the central tenet of which is that we cultivate a comfortable amnesia over the fact that all goods have material aspects (either in their mediation or production), and that, therefore, all goods are produced somewhere, by somebody. It also means being wary of the implication that human movement is finally facilitated by the imagination, by dream, hope or desire.

Secondly, and more insistently, I have tried to foreground the fact that the aggrandisement of the migrant artist, which is one aspect of this turn, relates to the general emphasis on distanced perspectives associated with those who hold high levels of cultural capital. It is those who are most free from direct material impingements that can consider themselves not to be 'sunk' in the social game and its illusion and can thus consider themselves to hold a certain vantage perspective. Demonstrations of this range from a carefully aloof consumption of art, to a recognition that essentialism is 'strategic'. We have already heard Fanon, writing from the context of the Algerian independence struggle, and arguing that not everyone finds themselves in a situation which allows for such coolly objective evaluations. Obiechina, writing in specific relation to Nigeria, states it plainly:

The world of the power maniacs and their resisters is [...] very often with no middle ground where one could stand and stretch one's legs and define choices. If you are not of the people of power, then you are of the victims[.] (1992, 19)

In a typically incisive essay, the Nigerian born critic Biodun Jeyifo cuts to the bone of the matter. Although the dichotomy implied between 'local' and 'foreign' readers is made falsely absolute by both Anglo-European exoticists and African cultural nationalists, we cannot ignore the fact that:

A special mode of the production of knowledge is involved here – a mode that privileges the *axiological exteriority and distance* of a sovereign cognitive subject from the object of that knowledge. (1996, 166)¹

What we cannot ignore, Jeyifo insists, is the fact that this privileging of the external position 'defines and consecrates the shift away from the African continent' (168) as a site for the serious academic analysis of African culture. We cannot untangle this from all of the wider relations of economy and production that have been responsible,

among other things, for the collapse of the African tertiary education sector and the migration of so many academics, in a spiral that only serves to re-enforce the importance of externality.

On the other hand, it was proposed in chapter two that this typical ideal of being both inside and outside the game licenses a space of critique for Western based theorists whose own, discourse focussed models of social process, whether they be the water-tight discursive field of *Orientalism* or the shifting and uncertain *Location of Culture*, make the act of social criticism problematic at best. We can see the position of the expatriate being put to a parallel work of narrative closure in some postcolonial fiction, and it was in this respect that I discussed the examples of Gimba and Ekwensi in chapter four.

This has been the central thrust of what I wished to argue and my contribution to a growing body of writing critiquing the positions - both social and theoretical - that characterise some versions of postcolonial social criticism. This is familiar ground by now and I need not repeat the question marks placed by Ahmad, Shohat, Brennan, Dirlik, Parry and others over the appropriateness (for example) of announcing the death of locality at just such a time as locally based resistance to transnational processes of production seems most necessary. Or, for that matter, their accounts of what the unintended effect of hybridity politics might be seen to be. A rather acid and admittedly simplistic paraphrasing of the dominant critical paradigm in cultural studies might be that 'identity is always outsourced'. Hardly a sufficient analysis, of course, but as a rhetorical tactic it foregrounds a certain uncomfortable relationship between postcolonial theorising and transnational corporate practice.

¹ Franco Moretti's recent conjectures on world literature, despite his sympathetic position, reasserts that in the face of the mass of written world fiction, the western critic must seek to recognise 'distance [...] as a condition of knowledge.' (2000, 57)

In terms of this thesis it has been crucial to try to engage carefully and in detail with actual recorded readings given to ‘migrant’ fictions; with the actual narratives made by migrants and their expressions of their sense of home. It is further confirmation of the high cultural capital levels associated with those theories criticised above that the clinching examples in their arguments are so often ingenious readings of the most consecrated contemporary works of art and literature, rather than any form of structured research or investigation. A very basic and primary guard against producing theory that serves an unintentionally ideological effect seems to me to be an acceptance of the duty to listen to what individuals from other social situations, and with different levels of all forms of capital, are actually saying.

These criticisms made, the question becomes: in what light do we discuss migrancy and the narratives it gives rise to, or the migrancy *of* narratives themselves? I have, in response to this, sought to reject consistently any kind of voluntarism and to recognise at all points the structural limitations that place brackets around *both* the kind of journeys upon which individuals can embark and the kind of stories they can plausibly tell out of these. In this respect I reject the suggestion that we are on the brink of a cosmopolitan order in which a reciprocal sense of the fragility and incompleteness of our projects of identity will inaugurate a new respect for each other. The idea of unity *in and through* difference is a familiar one. Marx also argued that human beings could become genuinely individual only in the context of society, hence that our sameness and our separateness are interrelated (e.g. Marx, 1970; see also Eagleton, 1998a). However, he also had the vital recognition that while the production of our material needs was grounded in exploitation we are united only in our estrangement from each other. Hence it is in the lens of alienation that I have tentatively sought to look at migrancy, and in various ways throughout the thesis. In

chapter three, for example, I gave an account of the institutional bias that still pushes Nigerian writers to look towards a Western audience if they wish to continue writing, something like a cultural tactic of primitive accumulation. In chapter seven I offered a discussion of the hegemonic position of Western cultural products that can distort the reception of narrative fiction in Nigeria. In both cases I sought to give examples of how these processes are also being resisted and refused.

Before moving on, I want to just briefly expand on this point, perhaps clarifying my argument a little. Given below is an equation that, if it was in any sense what it purports to be, would make this thesis and any other discussion of migrancy redundant:

$$ER(0) = \int_0^n [P_1(t)P_2(t)Y_d(t) - P_3(t)Y_0(t)]e^{-rt} dt - C(0)$$

Attached notes go on to explain:

where $ER(0)$ is the expected net return to migration calculated just before departure at time 0; t is time; $P_1(t)$ is the probability of avoiding deportation from the area of destination (1.0 for legal migrants and <1.0 for undocumented migrants); $P_2(t)$ is the probability of employment at the destination; $Y_d(t)$ is earnings if employed at the place of destination; $P_3(t)$ is the probability of employment in the community of origin; $Y_0(t)$ is earnings if employed in the community of origin; r is the discount factor; and $C(0)$ is the sum total of the costs of movement (including psychological costs).

If the quantity $ER(0)$ is positive for some potential destination, the rational actor migrates; if it is negative the actor stays; and if it is zero, the actor is indifferent between moving and staying. In theory, a potential migrant goes to where the expected net returns to migration are greatest[.] (Masset and others, 1996 [1993], 435)

When Papastergiadis and Appadurai insist on accounting for the role of the imagination - desire, fantasy, hope - in deciding human actions such as migration, they do so, of course, partly against such reductive neo-liberal models as this rational choice version. In this context, there can hardly be a refusal of their recognition of the non-material motivations that are entangled with movement. The formation and

transmission of narratives clearly does produce drives of expectation or fear that motivate human decisions, and I have tried to show therefore, the way in which stories *are* constructed out of migrant experience. However, Marx's dictum, already cited, has remained my memento of the limits that are placed on any 'work of the imagination' by economic necessity. 'If I have no money to travel, I have no *need* - that is, no real and self-realizing need - to travel.' (1970, 168) It is in this respect, therefore, when examining the stories told by Nigerian migrants of their trajectories, that I have attempted to deconstruct the sense of inevitability and personal volition in which they framed their 'iterological' tales. No desire, no imagining of study abroad or work overseas, is able to *realise itself* in a capitalist world. Human beings do make narratives, but the possible realisation of these narratives is dependent on factors and conditions which are not of our choosing.

In short, my point is to question the sense of voluntaristic agency that threatens to emerge as child of this critical conjunction between narrative and migration. Over fifty years ago, as part of his classic discussion of the myth of the eternal return, Mircea Eliade pointed out that the link between stories and travel may in fact be a much less hopeful one: i.e., that many people move precisely because of the impotency of their narratives in the face of a history written for them, or over them:

Modern man's boasted freedom to make history is illusory for nearly the whole of the human race. At most, man is left free to choose between two positions: 1) to oppose history that is being made by the very small majority (and, in this case, he is free to choose between suicide and deportation); 2) to take refuge in a subhuman existence or in flight. (Eliade, 1974 [1949], 157)

Although there are aspects of Eliade's position with which I disagree, his reminder is of the estrangement from any realisable 'work of the imagination' that is often at the root of migration in the modern world.

It is as part of all this, therefore, that I sought in various points of the thesis including chapters seven and five, to use the work of Pierre Bourdieu in order to examine the way in which migrancy and its narration can come to act as a form of symbolic capital. As respondents in Jos and in Glasgow described the idea of expatriate status it was apparent that this experience was allocated a currency of vision for those who could lay claim to it, and which was held *over and against* their local, sedentary counterparts. Although this is evidence from a different angle, it is perfectly congruent with the theoretical discussion of distanced perspectives with which the thesis began. Furthermore, it reiterates the point that certain forms of privilege, the possession of which is at least partially reliant upon possession of a certain economic and status position, come to present themselves as the achievements of imagination. By asserting that their presence in Britain was dependant on their own original vision of that possibility, expatriate Nigerians not only elided the role of all kinds of economic interventions that made their travel possible, but they also *took credit* for the result in a form of expression entirely in keeping with the form of symbolic capital with which their migration had *credited them*. This too, it seems to me, is a related act of the fetishisation of the imaginary. It is Bourdieu's work towards which I have repeatedly reached as a solvent to disperse this process of misrecognition by which cultural capital valorises itself and implements its distinctions.

Here as elsewhere, a distinction expressed as the product of imagination derives from a more material advantage even as it disguises this fact. We need to remind ourselves that mobility has always been a key pragmatic plank in the development and maintenance of exploitation, assuming that it is licensed to certain groups and not others. As Chossudovsky has argued (1997, chapter 3) and as the

increasing insularity of ‘fortress Europe’ testifies, the global cheap labour economy has as its sine qua non the existence of a static labour force in countries maintained in poverty and whose position is specifically at variance with the mobility of transnational manager and technician groups as well as the more ghostly passages of value in the form of computerised capital transactions. Long before this, but related to it, we encounter the historical fact that Europe’s key facilitating card in the development of exploitative labour and extraction relations with the future colonies was its development of relatively reliable vessels which made possible ocean going trade and exploration (Rodney, 1972, chapter 3).² The rhetoric of colonial discourse is a forerunner of the fetishisation of the imaginary in as much as its insistence on ‘the mission’, the ‘white man’s burden’ etc. helped elide the material and martial facts which actually facilitated imperial work. Administrator Girouard’s candid statement on missionary activity in the North of Nigeria - ‘baptism was only possible by the power of our bayonets’ (in Ayandele, 1966, 148) - is striking, but we should ask *why* it is striking. Much later, a well-known annual business review writes during the worst days of the Abacha regime:

Shell works in close partnership [with] the government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and its investments in Nigeria are long term so that talk of sudden withdrawals during political crises does not represent feasible company economics. (Arnold, 1997, 165)

The hypocrisy of this statement is apparent when we remember that the abstract ‘political crises’ referenced here include state-sponsored violence directly linked to the project of ensuring on-going mineral extraction in the Delta. This includes, therefore, the killing of the Ogoni Nine, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, and, more

² In Nigerian history, one might equally recall the development of the caliphate under Uthman dan Fodio. While the ideological unity of dan Fodio’s movement was clearly provided by a reforming Islamic intent, the practical extension of the caliphate’s influence was tied to the mobility of the Fulani military (e.g. Crowder, 1978, chapter 6; Hodgkin, 1975; Last, 1967). See appendix.

recently, the razing of the town of Odi. Despite the economically rationalised language, this sentence is startling for just the same reason as Girouard's: where one ignores the narrative of missionary zeal and desire, the other leaves aside the public relations narrative of 'investment in communities', 'commitment to sustainable development' and 'human rights' which were part of Shell's European promotional campaigns at the time and since.³ My point is not that narrative and imagination are unimportant in human life because the material discussed in this thesis would itself give the lie to this fact, but that *because* they are often put to a work of disguise in the service of exploitation (a process which the public relation efforts of corporations has engaged in with extraordinary efficiency) we need to recall at all times the entanglement of narratives with structures of social domination *and* how the unequal access to mobility, which is grounded in material and economic inequalities, helps continue and compound these.

Despite these materialist note benes it is not my intention to reinstate an economic determinism. Hence these conclusions are both repeated and expanded upon in the discussion of the reception of *Things Fall Apart* and *Consider the Lilies* by various groups of readers. Pieces of fiction, especially where these have been installed as part of the patrimony, *are* invested with significance. In the case of local readers they are marked as points on a curve of differentiation, often against a perceived cultural domination of Americana or the perceived historical fracture of colonialism. This expression of a cultural production as 'ours', both as something symbolically important, but also as a kind of cultural resource, is made in the transparent terms of which current thinking is sceptical. Nevertheless, readers do make these claims, often requiring complicated negotiations between ideas of

³ Quotes are from a Shell advert, *Financial Times*, September 23rd, 1999.

sameness and difference in order to do so, especially in the context of such historical and culturally diversity as exists in Nigeria. The scepticism about the transparency of these claims, however, is not without justification and I have tried to show that these are inherently claims to forms of distinction marked by the possession of types of cultural capital. In this respect, as pre-empted above, the competence displayed by the legitimate consumers of national fiction express a distinction that is, in the first instance, afforded by a freedom from material urgencies and the control over disposal of personal time which a certain level of wealth facilitates.

I hope to have ended however, on an optimistic note. It was precisely *not* a distanced reception that marked the encounter of working class Scottish readers with *Things Fall Apart*. In the context of all the preceding arguments it can be suggested that the 'sunken-ness' of their 're-plottings' of the novel on the one hand, and their primarily sympathetic engagement with the history represented there, on the other, are part of the same homological effect. Although the readers of *Consider the Lilies* in Jos were possessed of a much greater degree of cultural capital than the readers situated in Govan and Stranraer, they read from the other side of the historical repercussions of colonialism. In a sense, these two sets of reading converge. The idea that migrant fiction can develop a feeling and appreciation of structural homology seems to me a genuinely hopeful and necessary one in the context of a world where what travels faster and more easily than anything else is private capital. The poststructural point of Bhabha and others - that such a world literature can help make strange our own cultural certainties - is clearly true in many respects and I have discussed the paradox of estrangement and engagement which Achebe's novel offered to Scottish readers. But because it seems to me that we do not live in a world which

can be described as being in any sense post-structure⁴ I have chosen to emphasise instead the idea that ‘migrant fiction’⁵ can be a means by which we develop a feel for shared histories of exploitation rather than multiplying the bases on which to differentiate ourselves from one another. When Spivak refers to the development of ‘transnational literacy’ (1999, chapter 4) this is part of what she means although she also is clearly referring to our learning to read the routes by which material objects are produced and processed. Her timely call consciously repeats an earlier one. When Marx, in the manifesto’s prescient imagining of globalisation, refers to the rise of a world literature he does so in two ways (see Merrifield, 2000, 32 forwards). Tacitly, it is one among many rhetorical figures employed there to express the triumph of bourgeois world expansion and its traversal of all cultural walls. At the same time, implicitly, what the entire narrative of the manifesto pushes us towards, in all its literariness, is the use of human imagination to think the world *as a world*, and to read capitalist globalisation juxtaposed against that image of what it might have been. Rather than re-enforcing each other as the exchangeable currencies of privileged cultural capital, this is the conjunction between migrancy and narrative, travel and imagination, which seems to me most important and least divisive. At the same time, this putative work of the imagination forfeits all of its potential radicalism if we allow it to become fetishised to the point of believing that it can, in itself, conclude any project of social change, or if we turn a blind eye to entanglements of production, distribution and reception that bind the real world to its representations. As soon as

⁴ I appreciate that the term ‘post-structuralism’ relates firstly to the critique of theoretical structuralism which is associated with Levi-Strauss and others. Nevertheless, as argued in the foregoing, I agree also with Ahmad that by denying that capitalism is the primary structuring force in the world, ‘post-’ theory can inadvertently open the door to an individualistic, consumerist discussion of identity and agency.

⁵ As argued in chapter six, I use the term *not* primarily to describe fiction written by migrants or about migrant experience. (This not to discount this material, but its analysis is a separate one). In my usage here it refers to cultural products made in specific local contexts and about these local contexts and their history. Not always tacitly either, because fiction reflects debates and struggles over hegemonic

we slip into accepting this elevated ideal of narrative it begins its process of reification to a form of cultural capital that enables the reproduction of structures of dominance and exploitation.

As I argued at the outset, this is a dissertation concerned with distance. Within the current critical paradigm it seems nostalgic, perhaps even retrograde, to argue for the continued significance of locality and proximity in human life. My adoption of this position is related, firstly, to the results and experience of my research. It is, however, also informed by a sense that there may be a broader issue at stake here, one which is refracted in the opposition that characterises this academic controversy. I will conclude with a brief expansion of this point. The question of distanciation is, I argue, inevitably superimposed against another, broader social tension: capitalism's assertion of *exchange-value* as transcendent over and above the specific individuality of objects in their material use, and beyond this, the installation of value in the human act of production. This may seem an abstract point but Stallybrass (1998) recalls that it was in direct opposition to the 'sunken' worship of merely material objectifications (fetishes) among 'primitives' that the modern Western subject was constituted. In other words, the capitalist defines themselves by an ability to see through the naïve, emotive meaningfulness of specific objects to the tradable exchange-value of all things. Colonial history is only too full of testaments to the promotion of this idea, but the trade in African religious artefacts is among the most literal of proofs. When Marx adopts the term 'fetish' to describe the commodity, therefore, he is deliberately inverting a western, capitalist, self-aggrandising ideal and exposing the paucity and impoverishment of human life that lies beneath it. Friedman (1997) and Hutnyk (1997) point out the congruence of 'hybridity theory' with the wholly conservative

definitions, and because, as Macherey argues, it works with the very language of ideology reflecting the limits and 'unthinkables' which surround the circumstances of its production.

pluralism of the market, just as Brennan (e.g. 1997), Lazarus (e.g. 1999a), Bourdieu (e.g. 1998) and Fanon (e.g. 1965) all variously refuse proclamations of the death of the nation-state *while it is the case* that this formation remains the limited, often conservative but *only existing* arena in which groups and individuals can defend themselves against exploitation and the appetite of neo-liberal expansion. In such position-takings we can recognise the repercussion of this broader opposition, definitive of capitalism as such. It would be possible to multiply these references, or equally to multiply the list of sub-debates in which this wider social tension exerts a complicated pressure, an over-determination. Suffice to say in conclusion that this thesis has involved an attempt to map the refraction of this tension specifically within the realms of cultural production, reception and the theorisation of these processes. In insisting throughout on the influence of locality, in learning the need to take ‘sunken’ readings seriously, in questioning the claims of elite cosmopolitanism and in examining the rhetoric of ‘vision’ in narratives of expatriate experience I align myself clearly with one side of this social opposition.

Appendix 1: Historical Sketch

The principle motive of the British in creating Nigeria was [...] to serve an economic interest. (Nwankwo and Ifejika, 1969, 32)

Nwankwo and Ifejika are writing from the midst of an attritional civil war which finally claimed 100,000 military casualties and maybe twenty times as many civilians (McCaskie, 1996). Most of these starved to death in the federal blockade on Biafra that finally brought the war to its conclusion in 1970, and gave rise to the first examples of what would become a staple of the late twentieth century Western media: images of African hunger. In the historical moment it must have appeared that the co-authors cited above were witnessing the final and bloody break-up of a nation whose unity ran only as deep as the marks of imperial cartography. Marks made official, at least in a nominal sense, when Nigeria was unified into a single protectorate by Lugard in 1914. Under colonial history's seemingly arbitrary conditions Nigeria came into being as a nation marked by massive diversity. Within its borders there are, to take only one among many possible indicators, at least 70 languages with more than 100,000 users (Brann, 1993, 639). As the authors cited at the head of this section themselves suggested, the declaration of independence on October 1st, 1960 marked the end of the only centripetal force providing some cohesion against such a potentially fissiparous historical inheritance: i.e., the independence movement itself. Ngugi, following Achebe's own paraphrasing of Yeats, puts it starkly:

Neo-colonialism has put a bayonet on the things that held us together during the anti-colonial struggle, and things have fallen apart. (1997, 129)

That modern Nigeria appears arbitrary should not, however, blind us to a second fact suggested in Nwankwo and Ifejika's statement. While Nigeria was not constructed for and of itself, it was constructed in a form that served

the specific, if altering demands of British capitalist interests. It was a creation, in other words, with a very definite economic logic at its back. The historical sketch that follows takes this as its starting point and offers a broad, inevitably brief survey of the history of Nigeria.

Colonialism in Nigeria.

European contact with the Western seaboard of Nigeria began in the fifteenth century. As is suggested below, trans-Saharan influence in the north pre-dates this by some 500 years, and Umme Jilmi became the first Islamic Mai of Kanem as early as the eleventh century (Hodgkin, 1975). In the south, the kingdoms of Benin and Oyo had been established for around a century, their shared spiritual home in Ife guaranteeing a degree of peaceful co-existence.

Broadly speaking the history of European involvement in Nigeria can be envisaged in three phases. From initial contact to the nineteenth century the coastline and its immediate environment remained the frontier of interaction between Europeans and Africans. From around 1807, however, with the abolition of the slave trade, a more direct form of European involvement in the interior became economically expedient, a situation which sets the tone for British rule up until 1960. Initial trade in the delta focussed on pepper and exotic goods. However, with the opening up of the Americas came a European demand for man-power to enable the exploitation of the natural resources of the new world. What was required, in essence, was an instant labour-force, and this demand led to the exponential expansion of the slave trade. Slave holding was a recognised fact of native society although it may well have been

conceived more in terms of client-loyalty than property ownership (Falola, 1985). Within some indigenous systems, at least, those taken as slaves were not denied the possibility of social movement or of integration with local society (Horton, 1969, 37-56). Nevertheless, the prisoners taken amid continuing tribal warfare enabled groups on the coast to engage in profitable exchange relations with European traders. At this point European penetration of the interior was minimal; the effects of African 'fever' and a ready supply of the commodity of choice to the coast meant that there was little economic incentive to explore the hinterland.

By the eighteenth century, however, European merchant interests were starting to focus in a different direction. Trading houses were increasingly interested in the possible material wealth available directly from the heart of West Africa. 'Legitimate' trade already existed, especially in agricultural produce such as palm-oil and cotton. The drop in palm-oil prices between 1860-90 only served to intensify the British feeling that direct access to the resources of the interior was an economic necessity. The motives for these alterations were various, but central was a desire to by-pass the flourishing indigenous middlemen, the importance of establishing a monopoly on productive possibilities against competing European powers and the recognition that the direct control of extraction offered substantial benefits compared with purely trade based projects. It is coincidental that the discovery of quinine's anti-malarial properties at this point actually made British penetration of the interior a feasible project. Historically, although a sizeable

urban, and often migrant¹ labour force did exist, the means of production and the land itself tended to remain in the hands of small-holders and peasants, a fact that is related to the retention of a neo-feudalist ideology among the colonists (Ranger, 1986; Sender and Smith, 1986). Such small scale producers fell increasingly under the unpredictable demands of a foreign market, access to which was only available through local agents of the merchant houses with their relative monopoly on the purchase of produce for export. Wage labour did exist in larger numbers around extraction centres such as Enugu and in the urban hubs of administration.² In these cases, a labour-force was created both in directly coercive fashion (e.g. convict or corvee labour), but also by the imposition of taxes and courtesy of the rising demand for commodities and for education (Rodney, 1972, 168-175). Both of these new social appetites required a disposable surplus that the peasant small-holder could not produce working for themselves.

Despite the British government's reticence over political involvement in the region colonial ideology quickly reshaped itself into a project of civilisation, of conversion or of a protection of interests. All these were justifications suited to the more penetrative and aggressive movements of Victorian capital. The annexation of Lagos in 1861

ended finally the vocal assertion of Nigerian traders that they had the right to trade with any European power of their choice and on their own terms. (Nwanwko and Ifejika, 1969, 15)

Through so-called treaties of protectorate (e.g. Ayandele, 1966, chapters 2 and 3), military expeditions and the restructuring of native political institutions, the British

¹ According to Iliffe, the fact that much early wage-labour in Africa was migrant can be explained by the resilience of the pre-colonial belief that paid work on the behalf of another party in one's own home locality was inherently demeaning (1983, chapter 3).

consolidated their economic and physical hold over the southern and central areas and legitimated claims of ownership to their co-colonialists in continental Europe. The voluntary surrender of the Egba Alake in 1914 and Lugard's subsequent project to unify the regions mark the final note in a scale of increasingly direct political involvement.

The colonial moment proper as well as its long pre-history changed the indigenous world both politically and culturally. The increasing potential of trade and accumulation for groups in the hinterland necessarily brought about structural alterations within an existing social context. Accidents of geography determined a great deal in this respect. Those fortunate enough to find themselves placed in an intermediate position along the trade supply routes could demand payments as guarantee for safe-passage or engage in secondary trading themselves. As a result various coastal and delta kingdoms rose in political status as they absorbed the profits of their location. Within these societies any surplus tended to accrue to the more powerful sections. Even if the group as a whole benefited relative to its neighbours the rise of a nascent trading or broker class is noted. Increasingly, subsistence goods were converted to commodities, and the demand for these expanded particularly in the context of rising industrial areas such as the Jos tin mines (Sender and Smith, 1986, 1-34).

It may be legitimate to claim that the introduction of European demand in the early sixteenth century merely intensified a pre-existent pattern of trade. It is, however, hard to demarcate the point where a quantitative change becomes qualitative in its effects. With the increasing importance of location and access to trading opportunities came an increase in the motives for inter-group warfare. The devastating

² According to Sender and Smith, Nigeria in 1926 had 77,436 tin-mine and state sector workers (1986, 53).

Yorubaland conflicts of the nineteenth century derived in part from this new competitive dynamic (Rodney, 1972, 126-131). However, the wars had roots also in the political instability of the region following the collapse of the previously dominant Oyo empire. One of the major reasons for the weakening of this established kingdom would appear to be that its decentralised political structure was too cumbersome to react with the adaptability necessary in the face of new and fluid economic opportunities. In this respect the rise of the Egba societies or the 'house systems' of New Calabar both represent the development of new, centralised institutions which allowed economic wealth to act as a marker of social prestige even beyond hereditary honour or rank (Horton, 1969; Ayandele, 1966, chapter 8). Colonial social structure was in many ways, however, more feudalistic than fully capitalist and involved the construction of a new hierarchical rigidity in previously fluid social orders. As indigenous groups attempted to appropriate and manipulate the colonial symbolism of status and power, tradition 'hardened in a way that advantaged the vested interests in possession at the time of codification.' (Ranger, 1983, 254). Although in many respects colonialism represented a dramatic historical alteration of the pre-existing social orders, it was also a period in which some social groups were able to entrench a socially dominant position.

Missionary influence in Nigeria.

The role of Christian missionaries in Nigeria is too easily reduced to that of cultural road-builders for the colonial administration. Christianity, of course, was part of the whole nexus of cultural attitudes that existed in the West. As such it shared and therefore promoted some of those characteristics that Weber saw as peculiar to the

Western civilisation and which were particularly well-fitted to a capitalist system (Ilfte, 1983, 44.63). However, mission interests in the West of Africa were not always coincident with those of the administration, much less with those of merchants. In relation to the gin and slave trades especially missionary and church bodies regularly came into conflict with the trading concerns. The agents of Western politics, economics and religion never presented an absolutely unified triad of attitudes and the difficulty with which colonialism staged a front wherein 'the barracks stands by the church which stands by the schoolroom' (Bhabha, 1994, 83) has been a source of much recent theoretical concern.

Nor, for that matter, were the converts of the missionary period mere cultural dupes. To the extent that native religion was pragmatic, that is to say, affective or rational in form (Kayode, 1985), Christianity was accepted by some groups as a self-evidently more successful belief system. Ayandele further emphasises the specifically strategic nature of this move, involving a tacit recognition of the benefits education would bring to local trade interests and the standing of particular groups relative to those surrounding them. Other leaders, Jaja of Opobo for example (Ayandele, chapter 3), attempted to stand against Christian influence, the prescient assumption being that it might act as a force of social disintegration.

However, although the mission and administrative sectors of colonialism were never fully unified in their objectives, in the initial period of penetration especially '[t]he missionary was necessarily a revolutionary on a grand scale.' (Ayandele, 148). The mission was, crucially, the only European agency which specifically set out to alter traditional society, and by virtue of its message, to alter it from the roots upwards (Crowder, 1978, chapter 9). In its insistence on monogamy especially the Western church attacked the pre-existent social structure. An emphasis on the importance of

individualism, education and the work ethic was coincident with the emphases of larger colonial formations, but it was the church specifically that brought change on the level of domestic social institutions. Part of this was the fact that the missions in particular provided the spaces in which a Nigerian intellectual and middle class emerged (Mazrui, 1978, 1-20). In the context of the increasingly racist attitudes of the late Victorian era, it was this middle-class group which came to recognise that, despite Western liberal rhetoric, equality of opportunity and access to resources would only come with independence. It could be argued therefore, that missionary activity articulated most crucially with the framework of colonial capitalism in its control of local schooling and the establishment of an educational context for the rising national elite. In this respect, as Nwala (1980) and Kodjo (1980) have argued, mission schools can be implicated in the promotion of the 'ideological dependency' of the westernised peripheral ruling class.

The transfer of power.

Independent Nigeria was created largely by Nigerians. Groups such as the Zik movement and the early student organisations, as well as returning expatriates, were absolutely pivotal in visualising the possibility of independence and militating to achieve it. Nigeria was, in many respects, something fought for and gained rather than constructed by the British.

The educational process had equipped a few Africans with a grasp of the international community and of bourgeois democracy, and there was a most unsatisfactory credibility gap between the ideal of bourgeois democracy and the existence of colonialism as a system which negated freedom. (Rodney, 1972, 302)

However, qualifying this argument is Ahmad's recognition that the de-colonisation process was almost always smoothest where it involved a direct handing of power from the outgoing imperial forces to an established, native ruling class which shared the basic ideology of those who were departing (Ahmad, 1992, 32-35). The British incentives for direct colonial involvement in Nigeria were diminishing after World War II. In the North at least, trade concerns were being rapidly taken over by those of an indigenous merchant class. Here a group of small local producers fed lines of competing middle-men or brokers. Not surprisingly, then, in the context of indirect rule, the old aristocratic stratum of the emir class used their pre-existing client relationships to usurp the strength of the European merchants (Watts, 1987). In the South, as noted above, was an educated and often Christian group who 'were in fact [becoming] what the missionaries hoped they would, a rich, inventive, powerful middle class.' (Hodgkin, 1975, 69). Hence Ngugi can note, in the wider African context, that for many of those who took up the reigns of power in the newly independent states, the fight against colonialism had only ever been about increased personal access to economic advantages (1997, 16-19). The independent press in Nigeria offers an example that is typical in as much as it demonstrates the conservative agenda of a key vehicle of the new national imaginary. Local media were established from the start by businessmen forced out of the colonial companies, but their stance reflected unabashedly the social position of their proprietors: deliberately commercial and anti-labour (Ayu, 1997, 141-168). The contemporary Nigerian press has remained the property of a limited number of players and is equally 'circumscribed by the logic of ownership by capital[.]' (160). It might be added that in some respects the press is also an atypical example, given that ownership actually did pass into the hands of a local elite. In general this goes against

the rule of the transition between colonial and independent state, which tended to install a kind of intermediary ruling class, as is discussed further below.

British capital did not simply give up its concerns in Nigeria. What Britain did relinquish was a direct control on Nigerian politics and control of Nigerian export trade. At the same time it retained an indirect political influence through its ability to direct the investment of foreign capital and British companies also retained a direct economic interest in petroleum production and the import of low-grade manufactured goods (Williams, 1980, chapter 2). The three-way relation between the Nigerian state on the one hand and capital concerns, both foreign and local on the other, is a complex story (e.g. Biersteker, 1987; Oculi, 1987; Lewis, 1996, Ihonvbere, 1996, Kitching, 1987, Iliffe, 1983.). Nevertheless, what seems clear is that the general optimism shown in the Western community over the new Nigerian nation was tied in with the fact that what had developed was a distinctly capitalist ideology with an established ruling class. As Crowder says of the political climate of the first republic:

Despite declarations of socialist intent, all three governing parties were committed to the capitalist economic system. (1978, 259).

There *has* been populist activity in modern Nigeria, typified by the Agbeokoya farmer's rebellion in 1968 (Williams, 1980), the general strikes of 1945 and 1964 (Ihonvbere, 1997) as well as 1995, and on-going resistance to the privatisation and deregulation projects of the Bretton-Woods institutions. Despite this, Nigeria has continued to suffer from the competing claims on its resources and labour by sections of its own ruling class in various alliances with or against foreign multinationals. It almost goes without saying, but Nigerian 'independence' has long since ceased to be a matter measured against the influence of the British state as such, and increasingly a

matter of the mortgaging of the budget and public institutions to the controllers of international debt.

Pre-colonial integration.

It is necessary to provide some qualification to the rather stark focus in the foregoing sections on the impact and effects of colonialism. As both Crowder and Hodgkin point out, it is important not to accept the implication that British rule brought together a conglomeration of entirely alien states, peoples and tribes. The heavy emphasis on tribalism as the root of contemporary Nigerian problems tends to re-enforce this suggestion, and it does so by implicitly accepting the ideological vision of the nation as home to a people with a common ancestry and past. As postcolonial criticism has valuably pointed out, two birds are killed with this one ideological stone. Not only is the violence of contemporary Africa written off as the inevitable eruption of ethnicity, but at the same time, the historical image of colonialism is given a potent paternal gloss: Britain *creating* Nigeria. There is no ignoring the diversity and emotive power of the various cultural histories in Nigeria, yet Williams' insistence (1980, 10-21) that tribalism is a smokescreen remains important. The new leaders of independent Africa, according to Ake:

manipulated ethnic and communal loyalties as a way to deradicalize their followers and contain the emerging class division of political society[.] (1996, 5).

As Ihonvbere (1996) points out, successive military take-overs may have mobilised support along tribal lines, but they have in practice continually served the competing interests of various fractions of the one ruling class.

An emphasis on tribalism, then, is the correlative in discussions of modern Nigerian politics to the historical image of Africa as a continent of disparate, self-contained social groups whose conscious horizons extended only as far as the village boundaries. This is a simplification and a dangerous one in the extent that it flatters a retrospective image of imperial intrusions as unifying. In fact indigenous trade across the regions of pre-modern Nigeria was extensive and existed both over the estuary riverways and northwards towards the Saharan rim and beyond. These were exchange relations that probably began on a relay basis with rare or locally unavailable items moved from group to group. However, a group of non-agricultural, professional merchants who simply serviced established trade-lines was in place well before the colonial period. (Falola, 1985). Formal agreements, polygamous marriage and credit relations were all employed by this nascent merchant class to facilitate safe passage. This, inevitably, served to spread the web of inter-group and inter-kingdom connections although control of the trade and its surplus profits remained in the hands of powerful local rulers. The economic focus was largely northwards. The first use of camels to cross the Sahara, sometime at the outset of the last millennium, was crucial in opening up the possibility of long distance commerce with the regions of North Africa. This was to prove tremendously important and often divisive: the Hausa city-states of Kano and Katsina were sporadically at war over access to the southern end of the route from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (Hodgkin, 1975, 39). Falola goes as far as to argue that even up to 1895 the majority of native trade was orientated towards the Sahara (1985, 108). Furthering these inter-group relations and also providing knowledge of a larger world were the missionary movements of Islamic scholars and travellers southwards from about the fifteenth century. Further South, the

twin Southern kingdoms of Benin and Oyo 'were purely African states, whose growth was stimulated by contact by neither Islam nor Europe.' (Crowder, 1978, 47).

The Sokoto Caliphate, which was stimulated by Islamic contact, nevertheless provides a specific and striking example of the wide horizons of knowledge that existed in pre-colonial West Africa. Well into the nineteenth century the caliphate's hegemonic influence and, to a lesser degree military control, extended north beyond Katsina, east into what is now Cameroon and south-west to Ibadan and Nikki. Although the old kingdom of Bornu remained resilient in the north-western corner, it was an empire covering an area over half the size of modern Nigeria (Crowder, 1978, chapter 8; Last, 1967). By the end of the fifteenth the northern city states of Kano, Katsina, Zaria and the kingdom of Bornu had become integrated into the political concerns and cultural milieu of the wider Islamic world, albeit peripherally. Islamic influence and scholarship had filtered across and round the Saharan edge since at least the ninth century. However, a notable division existed in the Islamic northern community. There was, on the one hand, an urban Hausa grouping with tendencies, especially among the ruling class, towards a syncretistic mix of Muslim and pre-Muslim practices. The Hausa peasantry themselves were unlikely to have been Islamised to any great extent. A second grouping of more fundamental Islamic scholars and leaders existed among the nomadic Tuareg and Fulani peoples. This latter group historically held key clerical and administrative positions in the nominally Islamic Hausa courts and it was among them that a reforming jihad arose in 1804 under the intellectual leadership of Uthman dan Fodio.³ Although the holy war was

³ The parallels in social position between the educated Fulani who stood in the vanguard of the uprising and a similar, slightly more recent Christian elite in Southern Nigeria are seductive. Both groups had been educated largely through the historical influence of an incoming, universalist and monotheistic religion. Both groups occupy the intellectual and critical sector in a state where the political leaders are popularly perceived as corrupt and self-serving. And both groups have a sense of integration born out of a common experience of geographic movement. The migrant experience of Nigerian artists and

precipitated by a confrontation with the Sultan of Gobir its major complaint would seem to have been deep seated among the scholarly class:

As for the sultans, they are undoubtedly unbelievers, even though they may profess the religion of Islam, because they practice polytheistic rituals and turn people away from the path of God and raise the flag of worldly kingdom above the banner of Islam. (cited in Hodgkin, 1975, 245)⁴

Ideologically, then, this was a movement of religious reform and revival. An intellectual and teacher, dan Fodio had gathered around himself a scholarly community at Degel from the late eighteenth century. When the jihad began in force its intellectual unity was matched by the ability of the Fulani forces to mobilise over long distances, and this proved militarily decisive. Also important and possibly overlooked is the fact that any efforts at social reform met, at least initially, with the support of the rural peasantry. The caliphate was fully established by 1808 and with successive expeditions throughout the next eighty years it became a hugely influential and substantially centralised empire over the region sketched out above. Its reforming character would appear to have taken on a more political slant, much to chagrin of its early leaders who saw it falling into hands of those:

whose purpose is not the affairs of the mosques [...] but whose purpose is the ruling of countries and their people / in order to obtain delights and acquire rank. (Hodgkin, 1975, 260).

The symbolic head of the caliphate was established at Sokoto and regional control given to a series of emirs, most of whom were Fulani clan leaders. A number of

writers educated in the West is not, of course, in any sense a replication of the nomadic experience of the Fulani malams, although it may share more genuine parallels with the hajj that most of the Degel scholars would have undertaken at some point. The point is, anyway, that both groups did derive cohesion from their somewhat peripheral position vis-a-vis the wider polity, from their being 'less a hostage to their society [because of having] led a more mobile [...] life.' (Hodgkin, 1975, 52). There are, of course, vast differences between the two groups but the similarities are suggestive, especially in the context of Anderson's thesis that the original groups which militated for independence in south America were those in the clerical classes who met and formed networks during the 'secularised pilgrimages' of administrative travel (Anderson, 1991, chapter 4).

walled border towns were established and their rulers, directly answerable to Sokoto, balanced the potentially distance power of the emirs. It was this pre-existent system of control that made possible Lugard's policy of indirect rule when the caliphate was finally incorporated into another expansive empire in 1904. It also facilitated the possibility of a direct extraction of peasant produced surplus which in itself bridged the gap between the feudal, aristocratic states and the arrival of merchant capital.

Recent history.

Nigeria became an independent nation in 1960. Prior to this, however, in 1957 (in the West and East) and 1959 (in the North), the main regions of the country, already given a form of official existence in the three constitutions of the British regime, had become self-governing. This unstable balancing of a federal centre and of regional aspiration was to mark the increasingly complex Nigerian post-independence political picture. Tafawa Belewa, Nigeria's first prime minister, led a coalition government, with Nnamdi Azikiwe taking the position of a non-executive president when the nation became a republic in 1963. Three years later, following controversial parliamentary elections, a disputed census, and increasing unrest among the military over the constituency of the armed forces, an attempted coup resulted in Balewa's assassination. The Northern Christian Yakubu Gowon, then chief-of-staff, finally asserted control amid increasing inter-ethnic conflict and a general pressure towards a looser federal structure. In this atmosphere, and in the immediate aftermath of anti-Igbo killings in the North, Biafran independence was declared by the Eastern military governor, Lt.-Col. Ojukwu. The war began with a successful Biafran offensive, but

⁴ This quote is from Uthman dan Fodio, the *Tanbih al-Ikhuan*. That which follows is from Abdullah dan Fodio, the *Tazyin al-waraqat*. Abduallah, along with Bello, was a prominent figure of the jihadic

ended three years later, in 1970, after the slow strangulation and eventual bifurcation of the seceded territory. Although the reintegration of the country proceeded without the predicted reprisals against Igbos, Gowon set a pattern for future military governments by indefinitely postponing a return to civilian rule. Despite, or perhaps because of rising oil-revenue, nepotism and corruption were rife in the regime, with vast public expenditure programmes often tailored more towards the allocation of contracts than towards social development. Two years later in 1976, Brig. Murtala Muhammed replaced Gowon as head of state. His popular package of anti-corruption measures was cut short by his death in an aborted coup in the same year and he was succeeded by the then Lt.-Gen. Obasanjo. Obasanjo instituted a new constitution and, in 1979, following elections contested between 5 parties, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was installed as the first executive president of the new civilian government. The second republic was marked not only by the flux and instability of the political scene, including numerous splits and alliances between regionally based parties, but also the collapse of the economy and with it the expectations built up during the oil-boom. Shagari's regime, which had increasingly come to use its hold on state power as an avenue for 'primitive accumulation' (Onoge, 1992), had lost most of its social legitimacy by the time he stood for re-election in 1983. Although his party, the NPN⁵, claimed a decisive victory in both governmental and presidential polls, general scepticism over the validity of the results led directly to the bloodless coup of Muhammadu Buhari in December 1983, two months after Shagari had been sworn in for a second term.

In 1984 the ruling military council declared its right to put in place laws that were could not be legally challenged. At the time, Buhari's intervention had been

campaign and the early organisation of the Islamic state.

⁵ National Party of Nigeria.

broadly welcomed among an increasingly frustrated population, but this announcement was to prove typical of a long second period of military control. Backed by a largely Hausa officer group Ibrahim Babangida deposed Buhari in 1986, implementing a structural adjustment programme designed to allow the rescheduling of Nigerian debt with the IMF. Living conditions for the majority of the population deteriorated rapidly throughout the late eighties, exacerbated by multiple devaluations of the Naira and by the regime's repressive response to criticism. Despite the inauguration of an electoral commission and a committee to revise and re-establish the constitution the proposed return to democratic rule was postponed at various points between 1986 and 1992. Throughout the early nineties, local conflicts in Rivers State, Katsina, Kano and Taraba claimed large numbers of lives. Although these and other conflicts often appeared to have an inter-group or inter-religious modality, they have also to be seen in the context of sharply rising prices, the increasing appropriation and degradation of land and a public sphere in which violence had been installed as the final clinching argument since the colonial regime itself. Similarly, the long-standing dispute with Cameroon over the Bakassi peninsula, which claimed lives on both sides throughout the nineties, was exacerbated by the possible presence of oil reserves in the area.

Finally, in June 1993 the presidential election was contested between Moshood Abiola of the SDP⁶ and Alhaji Tofa, of the NRC. Despite initial acceptance of results giving Abiola the presidency the election was annulled by Babangida shortly afterwards and an interim national government announced, itself replaced by Sani Abacha later in the year. The Campaign for Democracy, which had been established initially in 1991, as well as various labour movements including those of

⁶ Social Democratic Party. One of two parties artificially created under Abacha as part of the putative run-up to democratic rule. The second was the National Republic Convention.

the petrochemical industries, immediately protested the rescinding of Abiola's victory. Indeed, throughout the middle of the nineties, as Abacha's regime engaged in new levels of repression, even formerly conservative groups such as those representing the judiciary became more critical of the government (Onoge, pers. com.). In June 1994, following a symbolic inauguration, Abiola was arrested along with numerous dissenting public figures. Clashes between striking workers and government security forces led to deaths in July of that year, and in January of the next the trial began of fifteen activists from MOSOP, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, a case which more than any other was to bring Abacha to the attention of the world media. In October, a special tribunal found nine of the defendants guilty of incitement to murder. They were executed shortly afterwards, prompting an international outcry that consistently fell short of an embargo on oil exports. Later, in 1996, Kudirat Abiola, herself a well-recognised critic of the military leadership was assassinated in an unexplained killing, widely believed to have been covertly sponsored by the government. Local tensions in the oil-producing areas continually resurfaced in 1996-97, and disruption to Shell's extraction programme led to military intervention in the area. As the 1998 deadline for presidential elections drew closer, it became increasingly clear that the five political parties established under the new National Electoral Commission were effectively puppets of Abacha, and all had confirmed him as their sole nominee by June of that year.

Abacha died, in what public rumour held to be the most salacious of circumstances, on the 8th of June, 1998. His successor, the chief of defence staff Abdulsalami Abubakar inaugurated a new electoral commission, appealed for prominent exiles to return home, and released some of the previous regime's political prisoners. Local government elections were contested at the end of 1998, and

legislative and presidential elections early in 1999. In the latter, Olu Falae, standing as the joint candidate of the All People's Party and the Alliance for Democracy, was defeated by Olusegun Obasanjo, the People's Democratic Party nominee. Obasanjo, who had been the only military ruler prior to Abubakar to have ceded power to a civilian government, had been in prison since 1995. He was inaugurated as president on the 29th of May, 1999.

The new democratic regime has presided over a period in which Nigeria has been welcomed back into the international diplomatic community, but one in which internal tensions have remained high. Following the declaration of Sharia law by a number of northern states, there has been sporadic, and occasionally widespread violence between Christian and Muslim groups. Estimates of the numbers killed in Kaduna following the state's initial attempts to introduce Islamic law in 2000 suggest over 1000 casualties. Elsewhere, separatist movements have been increasingly vocal in the major regions of the country, and the violence in the delta region has remained on-going both among local groups, and on the part of government forces who were responsible for razing the town of Odi at the end of 1999, killing dozens of residents. Obasanjo has been determined in promoting the World Bank's usual prescription of privatisation, deregulation and reform of the public sector. This insistence has met with protest publicly and among the legislature, as well as resistance from labour organisations, many of which, including the academic staff union, are also engaged in long-running public sector pay disputes. Privatisation of the public telecommunication body NITEL is imminent at the time of writing, and other parastatals, including the electricity provider NEPA and the national airline are expected to be sold by the government in the future.

Conclusion.

The often rhetorical or discursive focus of postcolonial criticism gives rise to an instinctive hesitation when we are faced with a statement such as that which begins this appendix. By stating that Nigeria was the creation of Britain, Nwankwo and Ifejika might appear to be buying into imperialism's own flattering discourse, an image of European intrusion as the initiating, driving force of modern history. This is an inference Shohat (1996) and McLintock (1994) have both drawn from the phrase 'postcolonial' itself because it allows for the placement of the colonial period at the very fulcrum point of history. It seems to me, however, given the context in which they were writing, Nwankwo and Ifejika are deliberately turning imperialism's paternalist claim against itself. Nigeria is what it is (i.e. a nation on the point of break-up) because of the economic exigencies that mark its point of historical production, and because of the colonial regime's self-serving responses to these. In this sense they are implying the dialectical fact that Walter Rodney would later discuss: Europe made Nigeria in order to make to Europe. Western industrial, capitalist development, to Rodney at least, is the direct correlate to African poverty, instability and violence, and vice versa. It goes without saying that although Rodney includes discussion of what we might now term colonial discourse, the bulk of his study gives a firmly material and economic basis for his argument. I want to conclude this historical sketch by looking at the consequences of the fact that Nigeria came into existence in the service of an economic interest. For the sake of structure I have broken my account into six slightly arbitrary, and practically inter-connected points.

Firstly, there is an infrastructural result. The arrival of colonial capitalism in Nigeria did give rise to road building, the expansion of communication facilities and

the other forms of technical and concrete groundwork associated with modernity. According to Sender and Smith, just under 3000 kilometres of railway were built in Nigeria between 1905 and the end of the Second World War (1986, chapter 1). Yet as Cookey (1980) argues, even this modest development was tailored to the requirements of capitalist concerns within the country. As such, it connected the hinterland sites of raw material extraction to the seaboard, and to the administrative centres. Its major facilitation, therefore, was the journey of primary commodities out of the country, and such official movements as were required to enable this to continue.

This relates to a broader point that can be made in relation to trade. From initial contact with Portuguese sailors forwards, the arrival of Europeans radically altered the nature and direction of African trade and production. As has already been seen, the economic focus shifted away from the trans-Saharan route towards the coastline. Local, integrative exchange was usurped by a focus on production for export, and although initially Nigeria escaped the problems associated with a single cash-crop economy, the later discovery of oil has placed it in an exactly parallel position. Just as the small-scale producers of the colonial era found themselves increasingly dictated to by the whims of a foreign market over which they could exert no control, the modern Nigerian economy cycled through a seventies boom to an eighties bust as a result of the fluctuations in world oil prices. Colonial export trade was locally dominated by foreign parties such as the Royal Niger Company, who controlled just under 42% of Nigerian external trade in 1939 (Cookey, 1980, 27) and by the colonial boards of purchase, whose relationship with these trading interests was generally indulgent, if not protective (Rodney, 1972, 179-189). Without having to accept the idea that some 'natural' order of internal economic development was disrupted in the colonies, it is still clear that this carefully circumscribed insertion into

the world market as a nation producing a single primary commodity has had on-going repercussions. Not the least of these is the degree to which large-scale concerns such as oil and gas extraction remain the arena of foreign corporations, or are reliant on imported foreign technology and therefore an elite cadre of expatriate management and technocrats. As Sullivan (1980, 44-55) points out, this remained the case in Nigeria despite the legislation of the 1970s which reserved positions for Nigerian nationals. In all of this, value is repatriated to the metropole without any concomitant developmental benefit to Nigeria. The actions of pharmaceutical companies in protecting their productive monopoly is only the most recently recognised example of Western capital's careful retention of its technological advantage vis-à-vis the non-West, even while such firms are willing to use African civilians as the unregulated test-bed for new products.⁷

As has been suggested above, colonial ideology was in some ways a traditionalist, neo-feudalist one. This is tied up with a third fact, which is that in much of Nigeria European capital was quite willing to articulate with aspects of pre-existing social formations, including subsistence farming and female domestic labour:

[I]n all the cases we have examined, capitalist relations initially utilised those non-economic [sic] means of exploiting labour which existed in pre-capitalist societies[.] (Iliffe, 1983, 32).

Again this historical action, which questions any notion of imperialism as *necessarily* modernising, has its contemporary extension. Chussodovsky (1997) powerfully examines the current internal division of labour, which he terms the global 'cheap labour' economy. A key fact of this is the active retention of a low social wage in the

⁷ In December 2000, the *Washington Post* reported that the drug company Pfizer had tested its new drug Trovan on patients suffering in the 1996 meningitis epidemic in Kano, north Nigeria. Allegedly, the company took advantage of the nearby emergency operations of Medecins sans Frontieres to administer the new product in place of, or in conjunction with the standard treatment Cephtriaxone. Some patients unwittingly involved in the trial died and relatives have protested that they were not made aware that they were participating.

postcolonial nations, and the reduction of social reproduction costs. In this respect such apparently vestigial institutions as small plot farming actually take on the burden of welfare provision as state funds are privately appropriated on the one hand, redirected to debt servicing on the other. As Claude Ake points out, many of the difficulties of contemporary Africa arise in this context. In relation to agriculture, for example, the relations between the state and the peasant have become structurally conflicting (Onoge, 1990) as the state has no direct and legitimate access to the surplus produced by small-holding farmers.

Such is to be expected in a continent whose leaders are seeking capitalist production in the context of largely precapitalist social relations of production. [...] The capitalist mode has become dominant but without accomplishing subsumption. It is this contradiction that the state and capital on the one hand, and the peasantry on the other, are acting out. (Ake, 1996, 64)

Many of those attainments that African social development managed to snatch from the jaws of imperialism quickly proved to be Pyrrhic victories. For example, the surplus that local middlemen and traders accumulated from the slave trade often went to assuage the rising appetite for cheap commodity goods, or paid for the strategic replication of those new symbolic trappings of power that colonialism so consistently put on display (Rodney, 1972, 103-112; Ranger, 1983).

This touches on a fourth point, which is that the postcolonial regimes of Nigeria inherited from their colonial predecessors two unwelcome facts. On the one hand, an utterly uncertain ideological foundation in which the presence of the state is always finally premised on the threat, and often fact, of violence. We have seen, elsewhere in this thesis, Fanon's unhappy prescience over this question. On the other hand, the postcolonial Nigerian ruling classes have not been primarily capitalist classes in their own right. As Claude Ake has it:

The African successor to the colonial regime constituted not so much of a capitalist class as a mix of salaried persons and petit bourgeoisie[.] (1997, 67).

Their position, instead, has been that of a comprador, intermediary group reliant on the control of contract allocation and on their right to determine who has access to the nation's human and natural resources. This is not only a clear extension of the work of the colonial regime itself, but has the inevitable result of making state and bureaucratic positions primary avenue of personal accumulation (Barber, 1982; Lewis, 1996). In the context of a nationalism which has never been fully assured, ideological claims to entitlement in relation to these state positions tend to be played out for the benefit of limited ethnic constituencies. The state becomes, therefore, not so much the arena of political competition as the *goal* of that competition (Williams, 1980, 68-109), a competition which is itself played out in increasingly divisive rhetorical terms. Obviously, under such circumstances, even formal democracy is a fragile construction, the military fraction of the elite having a constituency that is better mobilised and better equipped than any other. As Ake points out, the violence of the public arena is liable to alienate those members of the elite with sufficient cultural capital, whether technical or intellectual, to inaugurate genuinely developmental projects. Contemporarily, as is further discussed below, World Bank sponsored reforms have served to exacerbate the probable violence of the civic arena and consolidate the state's repressive role in relation to the wider population.

Fifthly, and more directly, it is Nwankwo and Ifejika's central point that the exigencies of the colonial regime created a Nigerian nation already riven by a de facto regionalism. This fissiparous inheritance comes courtesy of the differences between the administrative forms adopted in each of Nigeria's main areas. Put very broadly, there are clear historical distinctions: indirect rule in the north coupled with a limiting

of mission activity; the strong Christianising influence in the east beside such definite social alterations as the inauguration of warrant chiefs; and large scale economic concentration in the west in the context of a less disruptive relation to Yoruba syncretism and its political formations. This uneasy tripartite structure is complicated by the existence of very many other, smaller distinctions within and across the regions, themselves related to the fact that the colonial administrative use of censuses, and its production of taxonomies, tended to create the very grounds on which an increasingly ossified idea of ethnic identity would become politically important (Appadurai, 1996, 114-135). The centrifugal pull of regionalism in Nigeria has remained powerful, and indeed under Obasanjo groups such as the Oodua Peoples Congress have become vocal and often violent proponents of secession, in this case for the west. Nwankwo and Ifejika write from an early historical expression of the same tendency, and do so to relate it back specifically to the colonial regime's self-serving desire to find the easiest form for its sometimes precarious rule, often in order to secure the work of British trading concerns.

All of this, as already stated, leads to the sixth point, which is that Nigeria, in common with other postcolonial nations, has been reliant on foreign capital, either in the sense of payments to secure rights for operations in the delta and elsewhere, or more directly in the extension of loans. Ake points out that much of Africa's current debt derives from credit given by western financial institutions during the oil-boom of the early seventies, as a way in which to lose their excess liquidity (1996, 103-104). Paradoxically, in a sense, Nigeria was borrowing the surplus profit of industries operating within its own borders. Ankie Hoogvelt gives a clear statement of the central argument here:

[T]he importance of formal colonialism [lies] in the legacy of the international division of labour, of resource bondage and the westernisation of the peripheral elites. (1997, 26)

Reflecting the experience of other African nations, Nigerian governments have increasingly found their room for manoeuvre limited as the international financial institutions use the leverage of conditionality to exert control on policy making. Bababangida's 1986 structural adjustment policy was put in place primarily to secure a re-scheduling of debt, and included such IMF recommended austerity measures as currency devaluation, and pay cuts for public and private sector employees. Inevitably, these and the constriction in the public budget following reallocation of capital to debt servicing, hit the poorer majority of the population hardest. Income differentials widened dramatically in the decade after 1985 (Lewis, 1996, 98). As commercialisation of the public sector returns to the agenda under Obasanjo, hikes in prices for all basic commodities are likely and it seems probable that the current regime will be forced to act repressively against an increasingly restive population, particularly the urban labour force. In this respect, as Chussodovsky argues (1997, 45-73), the modern postcolonial state is reduced to acting to protect the projects of foreign capital concerns and keep its own national populous in check. As is implied by his deployment of the phrase 'market colonialism' (37), this relationship between western capital and African states is not new, but simply an exacerbation of the intermediary structural position within the world economy that they inherited from colonialism and the violence necessarily attendant on such a location.

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This is a comprehensive bibliography. It includes references for all citations made within the body of the thesis, as well as all other material consulted in the preparation of the dissertation and during the conducting of the research.

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