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Narrating Violence and the Nation in Nigeria in the Fiction of Anthonia Kalu and Sefi Atta

par

Mayssa Zouaghi

Département d'études anglaises

Faculté des arts et des sciences

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Ce mémoire intitulé:

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Présenté par :

Mayssa Zouaghi

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Président-rapporteur

[information retirée / information withdrawn]

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Directeur de recherche

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Membre du jury

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine deux représentations littéraires contemporaines de violence politique dans l'histoire nationale nigérienne après l'indépendance. Dans <u>Broken Lives and Other Stories</u> par Anthonia Kalu et <u>Everything Good Will Come</u>, par Sefi Atta, les auteurs représentent la nouvelle nation et le nationalisme comme mouvements ainsi que corps politiques et sociaux qui sont à la fois violents et génériques (reliés au conflit des genres masculin-féminin). La collection de contes de Kalu offre de multiples témoignages fictifs de la guerre civile, racontés du point de vue des Igbo en Biafra. Quant au texte de Sefi Atta, il retrace la période d'instabilité gouvernementale et militaire après la guerre à travers le développement d'un bildungsroman féminin. Les deux œuvres sont complémentaires de point de vue conceptuel, dans la mesure où elles tracent les mécanismes de force et de persécution tels que la guerre et la militarisation principalement utilisés par l'état en pouvoir, ainsi que la manière dont ces mécanismes s'intègrent dans la structure sociale et psychologique de l'individu et la communauté en se manifestant dans la violence et l'instabilité. Éventuellement, cette étude analyse les techniques de narration employées par les auteures qui sont à la fois réflectives et subversives des mécanismes de violence et du pouvoir.

Mots-clés: Violence, Genre, Nationalisme, Nigéria, Guerre civile, Militarisme, Littérature féminine

Abstract

This study explores two contemporary literary representations of violent national historical moments in postcolonial Nigeria. Reading Anthonia Kalu's collection <u>Broken Lives and Other Stories</u> and Sefi Atta's novel <u>Everything Good Will Come</u>, I argue that both writers depict nationalism and the nation as violent and gendered processes of political and social community formation. Anthonia Kalu's stories record a multiplicity of fictional testimonies from Biafra during the civil war, while Atta's narrates the post-war and military rule period in Nigeria in the form of a modern female protagonist's bildungsroman. Both works show complementarities tracing the violent and gendered power mechanisms used by the nation-state such as war and militarism, and how these become internalized in the public and private social practices as well as within the individual and the collective psychic structures. This work subsequently examines the generic choices and narrative strategies used by the writers to translate the different manifestations and intersections of structural and gender violence as well as to possibly resist and subvert them.

Keywords: Violence, Gender, Nationalism, Nigeria, Civil War, Militarism, Women's Literature

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Dedication

To Mahmoud Darwish, *In Memoriam*:

"Nations come and go, but the countries remain"

Czeslaw Miloz

The Captive Mind

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Introduction

In the wake of the twenty-first century, Nigerian national history of political violence and instability remains a highly debated subject. Given the country's ethnic, religious, and political diversity, the rise and fall of various nationalist movements and conflicting systems of governance, ranging from civil rule to military governments along with the different regional and autonomous political organisms, (Falola, 110-15) has been and remains a major focus for a number of Nigerian writers. As Obi Nwakanma explains:

> Nigeria is, in its current formation, a hybrid state; a nation of multiple nations coalescing to form the basis of nationness and national belonging. One of the fundamental sources of its evolution is to be found in its literature, particularly in poetry, that most nationalist of genres, but significantly also, in the form of the novel, which constitutes much of the narrative of nation. Modern Nigerian literature can now be categorized in three to four movements, or generations, starting with the Azikiwe/ Osadebe generation of nationalist poets, to the late modernists Achebe, Okigbo, Soyinka, etc., to the current generation or category of writer whose writings encompass the new attitudes, desires, values, and anxieties of the postcolonial nation.(2)

The historicity of nationalism is therefore enacted within the literary tradition in the evolution of the idea of the nation through the different generations of writers. In this context, past national crises such as the civil war or military dictatorships provide a rich imaginative and narrative material for contemporary emergent writers. The literary and fictional reconstructions of the political past allow the conceptual and aesthetic explorations of the development of national identity and politics in the post-colonial context. From this perspective, a renewed interest in these troubled moments marks many third generation Nigerian women texts and writers such as Anthonia Kalu and Sefi Atta who engage with violent historical moments from different generic and narratives perspectives. This study

explores the way they reconfigure the issue of past violence in national history and its relationship to contemporary political, social and literary key issues for these writers.

Reading Kalu's collection <u>Broken Lives and Other Stories</u> and Atta's novel <u>Everything Good Will Come</u>, I argue that both writers depict nationalism and the nation as violent and gendered processes of political and social formations. This depiction serves to highlight the continuity of violence as a way of implementing identity politics across the different phases of the nation's history. Anthonia kalu's stories undertake this project through recording a multiplicity of fictional memories and testimonies from Biafra during the civil war, which together depict this violent event as contingent in the national imaginary and narrative no matter how "forgotten" or disconnected it is in contemporary writings. Atta's novel, on the other hand, narrates the post-war and military rule period in Nigeria in the form of a modern female protagonist's bildungsroman. By framing the national narrative into the individual female one, Atta manages to create a double narrative where the untold history of violence such as the civil war functions as a textual unconscious linking the text and the protagonist to that history.

In addition, in revisiting these troubled moments in Nigerian history, the writers open spaces for rethinking the nation "as a relational space" to use Elleke Boehmer's term (17), where different violent and gendered imaginaries and politics meet and collide. The texts constitute not only narratives recurrently treating the theme of national instability, but also meta-fictional and self-conscious discursive experimentations with the history of postcolonial literary writing in Africa in relation to nationalism, violence and gender. Both works show complementarities in tracing the violent and gendered power mechanisms used by the nation-state such as war and militarism, and how they become internalized in the

public and private social practices as well as within the individual and the community's psychic structures. This work examines subsequently the generic choices and narrative strategies used by the writers to translate the different manifestations and intersections of structural and gender violence as well as to resist and subvert them.

The first chapter of this study explores the problematic of narrative representation as related to national violence. This part mainly highlights how, following Benedict Anderson, "communities are not to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). In foregrounding the styles of imagined communities, Anderson draws attention to the limitless possibilities inherent in the act of imagining. Frequently, these imaginings are violent ones, involving restrictive or limited definitions of national belonging and identity as well as imposing forms of legitimacy and authority in relation to cultural and political expression. Specifically, I focus on the (il)legitimacy of gender in the national imaginary and literary tradition and how new Nigerian women writers represent the violence as an inherent practice in nation-states, traditions, and other forms of political and social authorities and which inhibit the development of women's political and literary voices. The writers use the narrative consciousness as a medium for developing women's self-expression and agency and they reconfigure the past as way of establishing dialogue with the previous generations of writers both male and female.

Moreover, Philippe Bourgeois and Nancy Sherper-Hughes suggest that in war and military contexts, one need to read violence as a social category of analysis. (4) From this perspective, the second chapter of this study focuses on Anthonia Kalu's text as an experimentation with narrating violence in the context of war. Kalu's collection of short stories recounts the trajectory of Biafra from the early period of independence to its

declaration and the outbreak of the war from multiple narrative perspectives. In this chapter I investigate the fictional re-construction of the early moments of violence in the development of national identity from independence and to the symbolic reconstruction of Biafra as a violent counter narrative to Nigerian official "federal" nationalism. Biafra appears at the same time as an unfulfilled nation or failed "independence" which is made to signify upon the larger decolonization experience of Nigeria. This crisis of nationalism I argue can be related to narrative representation through the particular fragmented form of the short story which translates the violent political and historical discontinuities.

The third chapter of this study engages with the issues of symbolic and structural violence as related to the experiences of military rule in post-civil war Nigeria in Atta's novel. I examine the problematic of public and private spheres of violence and how the novel collapses, through the different metaphors of disorder and embodiment, the division between state and domestic patriarchal power. The military state's valorization of the patriarchal values of authority and violence is depicted as affecting the consciousness and bodily experiences of different female characters. In this part I focus on the different models of development or "bildung" offered in the novel through the couple of Sheri/Enitan" and the extent to which the different structures that determine female agency and self-fulfillment are transgressed or re-appropriated by women themselves. Subsequently, this chapter highlights the role of women's writing in consolidating or subverting the dominant ideologies and in creating a particular narrative form for women's political activism.

As a whole, this study explores the prominence of literature as a vehicle for articulating the gaps in historical narratives, in relation to women and the nation-state, and the obliteration of women's connections with national history. Through both the short story and the novel, the writers engage in creating a narrative space to speak out these violent and connections as well as to register the different strategies of resistance to and transgression of violence which help defining women's agency both within and without the national frame.

Chapter One:

Nationalism, Violence, and the Problems of Narrative Representation in Anthonia Kalu and
Sefi Atta's Texts

Women Writers, Violence and the Imaginings of the Nation-State

Defining violence in relation to the nation-state constitutes a challenging task. To start from a specific situation, for instance, during the Nigerian-Biafran conflict, the use of violence by the federal government was legitimized by declaring Biafra "illegitimate" as a state. The very definition of violence within this context is determined by as Donald Donham explains the prior notions of social existence and interaction within the frame of the modern state: "in our times, the legitimated sociality is assumed to be the modern state….Our current notions of what counts as violence is fundamentally imbricated with ideals of the modern state" (20). Because Biafra was denied "official" or federal recognition, war as a violent strategy was used to "discipline" and repress the anti-federal nationalism. Hence, violence itself becomes a mode of national organization and becomes ingrained in the imaginary of the nation-state as part of its attributes (power) and functional in its political practice.

The process of legitimizing violent action in the war context involves two steps. As Hannah Arendt argues, the kind of violence advocated is first "distinguished by its instrumental character" (239) and second defined in relation to power as substitutive in case of failures "where power has disintegrated" (240). Violence and power are then "opposites, violence appears when power is in jeopardy" (241). Arendt's theory of violence specifically reiterates the changing and unstable notion of political power within the national frame. As suggested in the previous part, the shifts that occur in the definition and operations of power and the outbreaks of violence are reenacted at the cognitive and imaginary level as a form of violent and unstable consciousness.

Through narrative consciousness, I attempt to trace the way in which both Kalu and Atta's texts register the different passages, shifts and subsequently instabilities within the narrative frame and voice. I will start by examining the narrative aesthetics used by these writers in relation to gendered representations. On a second level, I will try to explore the representations of violence as moments of both cognitive, emotional and narrative impasses as well as radical changes in the notions of subjectivity and social identity. In the second chapter, I focus on the civil war and how, as Shani D' Cruze and Anupama Rao suggest, "Wartime violence marks out temporal and spatial zones of exceptionality" where new "potentialities for subject formation" (11) are open through and through. In the third chapter, I trace how these inherited violent formations in the Nigerian political and social system later continued to define, interact with, and limit the different national development possibilities as well as the individual and personal careers and lives of the characters in Atta's novel.

The majority of Nigerian women's writing is historically situated within the so-called second and third generation authors. Yet such location of women's fiction often obscures the problematic of gender as related not only to these texts but also the main or dominant literary tradition itself. Ironically enough, the opening up of the Nigerian "national canon" by and to women writers is only a recent critical turn appearing simultaneously with the twenty first century's texts which increasingly address Nigerian national and literary history. As Florence Stratton explains, the early critical receptions of first postcolonial writings by Nigerian women such as Flora Nwapa or Buchi Emecheta relegate their works in terms of the thematic "deficiencies" and focus on "everyday trivia" related to women's lives rather than "greater" national issues (80-81)[1]. This history

constituted therefore a basic ground in de-legitimating women's concerns and narrative choices within nationalist ideologies. Since, and as explained above, the nation-state is imagined restrictively and violently, this cultural dismissal of women's causes and claims (Stratton, 10) mimics and reproduces the same violence used by the national imaginary in managing cultural difference.

Although Women writers foreground issues of gender in rewriting the different moments of Nigerian history from the pre-colonial to independence and through the civil war and the experiments of the three republics, national history itself is still critically de-gendered. In this context, a number of feminist, postcolonial, and gender critics have drawn on the frequent ellipsis of gender as an analytic rather than cultural category when considering nationalism and especially questions of national conflict and instability. As McClintock argues, generalized and essentialized notions of time, space and history as related to the concepts of nation, culture and literature lead to the continuing assumptions of homogenous or "de-gendered" practices in national and literary discourses and communities of which gender is cast a minority discourse and experience rather than the actual operating mechanism through which such practices are carried (89).

In order to determine the violent and gendered "syntax of postcolonial nationalism" or the "grammar" which "organizes nationalist discourse and imaginary" as Boehmer names it, (70) one needs to look at the dominant not only literary but also critical and theoretical premises which mutually contribute in shaping both political and fictional accounts of the nation. As McClintock explains this helps to elaborate a "strategic feminist theory of nationalism" which would include not only gender specific experiences as depicted in literature but also gender as a historical and aesthetic "category of analysis" to

bridge the critical gaps left out by the major theorists of the field such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, or even postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Timothy Brennan (16). Subsequently, and to use Florence Stratton's words such critical strategies allow the re-integration of "women written out of the [Nigerian] literary tradition" and hence, the possibility of establishing not only a female "lineage" and tradition for contemporary Nigerian women writers with their first "generation" precursors but also "dialogue" with their male compatriots in negotiating , subverting and re-appropriating the national imaginary.

Another form of theorizing legitimacy appears as Timothy Brennan argues that the nation is "precisely what Foucault has called a discursive formation- not simply an allegory or imaginative vision but a gestative political structure which the third world artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of" (46-7). This "national longing" appears however as a double bind, a sort of "Freudian" lack-desire pattern which is necessarily inscribed into the artworks and writings of postcolonial artists. Brennan's formulation finds its echo in the major gendered tropes or "conventions" deployed by male postcolonial writings which define the very national nature of these texts. One of these tropes is what Boehmer calls "The 'engendering" of the nation as female and of nationalism and political action as male (33). This trope constitutes part of "the symbolic economy of nationalism" (28) which underlies the cliché "longing" or desire for the "mother-nation".

Brennan's argument claims the compulsory and hence violent imaginary imposed on postcolonial writers. His model of unity and collectivity of longing leaves no room to examine the inner tensions and political crises witnessed by countries like Nigeria outside the tragic or nostalgic model of national desire and lament. Far from simply being "a

formal" question in literature, then, nationalism is depicted as a totalizing and totalitarian drive whereby every postcolonial writer is to be similarly engaged within the shaping of the nation's totality. The assumed and generalized unity of needs and purpose in postcolonial writing rules out the possibilities of resistance or revolt as well as anti-nationalist drives frequently advocated in the postcolonial literatures of political and social disillusionment. In the cases of totalitarian or patriarchal nation states, women's and minorities' potential of resistance through literature and literary writing is further highjacked by the theoretical and discursive hegemonies which are themselves part of the violence of the state.

Moreover, Nira Yuval Davis explains how the "sexual division of labor and power" at work within nationalism assigns active agency (desiring) to male subjects while locating the female one on the "passive" (desired) axis as she is "required to carry the burden of representation" and "to embody the nation" with therefore, "no need to act" (29). This is reenacted at the actual political level with little or no political power and representation for women as active or equal citizens to men. (27) Hence, and as McClintock observes "the representation of male national power depends on the prior construction of gender difference" (89).

As a result, the new generation of women writers works within as well as outside dominant literary modes and narrative conventions to expose the hegemony and violence within these mechanisms of gender construction of the nation and its narrative.. In this context, I read the increasing phenomenon of new Nigerian women writers historically situating their stories and texts in the troubled episodes of the nation as a form of doubly contesting national and gender constructions which are oppressive or limiting for women. In this sense, I depart from Brennan's argument by emphasizing the break with the

dominant "male" longing for formal and national unity to trace instances of national and political instability as equally empowering for some women allowing them to transgress the rigid social constructions of gendered identity and for writers to reconstruct their own imaginary voice and tradition within the literary canon.

On a second level, in claiming the formal or the aesthetic as the site of negotiating history and historical narratives the writers elaborate a kind of African "gynocriticism" as identified by Nana Wilson Tagoe in the "self fashioning" of a narrative consciousness and style as well as codes of interpretation by constantly referring to and re-appropriating the fictional modes and narrative strategies used by earlier women writers to address the gender question (11). The tradition is articulated not only in the form of aesthetic conventions, but also as I argue in the following subpart, through a gradual building and elaboration of the concept of African women's national and feminist consciousness as a form of imagination and a historical narrative especially through the biographical or first person narrative voice of the female protagonist.

Gender Politics and Narrative Aesthetics

Defining the features of a feminist tradition in African women's writing constitutes a double task as it involves the critical assessment of both women's writing and feminism. On the one hand, it involves the contextualization of these writings within their specific historical, social, and literary backgrounds, to determine how they are constructed with and in relation to a variety of experiences and narratives. On the other hand, it also requires the understanding of the particular historical and textual treatment of issues of feminism and gender as private or interpersonal politics. Although African women's texts recurrently foreground sexual and gender politics, yet these cannot be Buchi Emecheta explains "only

sexual politics". Emecheta argues against a universalist "western" metanarrative of feminism which advocates sex and romantic love as "life" or "achievement" and explains, how, in the African context in general and the Nigerian in particular, feminism must be written "with a small f" and inscribed into the social, economic, and political life struggles of women. (12) One way of tracing the continuities of the different experiences is to investigate the relationship between state violence and dominance and the social domestic spaces of marriage and the family.

Subsequently, as Lee Erwin explains, there is an urgent need to "disarticulate the term romance from the category of Nigerian women's popular fiction with which it has become linked in recent criticism" (81). For Erwin, the case of the majority of Nigerian women emergent popular fiction being categorized as "romance" constitutes a form of colonial reading which obscures interrelated questions of race, class and gender treated in those texts and which are more urgent than sexual oppression or patriarchy:

> The primary burden of the novels is not the sexualized gender relations that dominate western reading practices but a broader negotiation of gendered social formations in which what is conventionally defined as romance constitutes only one of several strands. (81)

He further explains that "developmentally urgent issues such as education, careers, social mobility, women's political roles, and marriage, areas in which they take issue with male-authored novels' gender ideology and the forms of authority that are claimed to underpin it" (83). Equally, he warns against the uncritical and often utopian and hegemonic advocating of "tradition" in terms of national or native culture and literature. In order to consciously and historically situate themselves and their writings, writers and critics must address both

questions of the "restrictive elements of African traditions and modern western romance" (84).

Strategically using this double position, many Nigerian women writers are dialectically and dialogically engaged in critical and literary self fashioning. Interrogating the different narratives of tradition, and the male literary canon, as well as colonial/neocolonial hegemonic modes of cultural expression, the first waves of post-independence women writers such as Flora Nwapa or Emecheta, sought to create an intertext of references and writing conventions between each other as a way of building an aesthetic and thematic literacy continuity of their "own". One of the examples of narrative continuity or "gender lineage" in fiction as identified by Stratton is the continuing intertextual references to Nwapa's first novel Efuru such as in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood (80). Similarly the new generation of writers revisits these earlier texts in order to explore and carve critical and narrative tools of reception for their texts. I investigate this continuity in terms of two conventional tropes used by these writers: first the appropriation of the nationalist-male narrative model of autobiography and the foregrounding of mothering and motherhood as an ongoing empowering narrative metaphor of both women's literature and national belonging both inside and outside hegemonic patterns of signification.

The relationship of autobiography as a genre and literary mode to nationalism is described by Jane Bryce as follows:

the relationship of the post-Independence generation of Nigerian writers to the process of constructing a Nigerian postcolonial national identity, and in particular, "Soyinka's project of self-creation as autonomous agent of his own destiny, metonymic of nation-formation, (a)s an informing principle of African autobiography" (see Bryce). I concluded that analysis with the words: "For an alternative vision, and other 'possible types of relation' in the narrative of nationhood, we have to look to the new generation of women writing in Nigeria, to feminist critics, commentators and historians. (51)

Clearly and as it is practiced within the canon, autobiography and first-person narratives reenact Brennan's metaphor of national male longing for achievement and self realization. Equally, Elleke Boehmer explains how "the leader's autobiography" functions as "a national genre" "*form-giving or in-forming narrative* genre" (66) for the nation. According to Boehmer, the male "growth to self consciousness" is metaphorically depicted as both the "national journey" and "genealogy" in time and space (70). Opposed to this pattern, Boehmer finds how through the majority of postcolonial nationalist movements, the nation itself is imagined as mother whereas the male leaders are depicted as "the nationalist sons" (71). In this sense, she explains, the autobiographic male genre becomes a metaphoric "masculine embodiment of unity and continuity which is cast on the female plural and chaotic imagined geography and temporality. (83) Subsequently, Boehmer situates the writing of female authors as a counter-inscription of national consciousness and development into the multiple and feminine heterogeneous textuality as well as through the mothering trope to re-appropriate a space for the representation of women's agency.

In this respect, Florence Stratton demonstrates how Nwapa is for instance represented as "the mother of African female tradition" (80) by almost all the next generations of women writers. Stratton explains this fellowship and continuity in terms of Nwapa's use of traditional female mythical archetypes to establish "cultural legitimacy of

female power" (90) and, as Nwapa herself argues, "dwelling too much" on the issue of mothering and infertility, in order to break male stereotypes and "romanticized" hegemonic metaphors of motherhood and show it as "a social construct" and a cultural experience rather than a natural, "essential one" (531).

The National "Genres": Storytelling and the Buildungsroman.

The choice of the genre constitutes another level of engaging with the literary tradition. Women writers' departures from the available generic structures register the different problematics of the narrative representation of the nation. As Brennan, Anderson, Boehmer, and a number of other theorists have delineated, the novel holds a primary position as a "national" genre compared to other forms of narrative. The main relationship of the novel to the short story in the context of African national literature as Ada Uzoamake Azodo observes, is that the short story is that postcolonial short stories are not yet a clear category as the novel. In the context of the civil war, however, Kalu's use of the genre becomes a powerful narrative restitution of the Igbo oral tradition as well as a metaphoric fragmentation of the national space as an allegory of the war.

The short story appears most effective in the representation of the quick and violent shift in community structure and modes of identity during war. As Ada Uzoamake Azodo explains, the story "tries to capture a moment in history by making a quick statement about a contemporary situation" (299). The stories' brevity, condensation and snapshot style enables to easily represent notions of violence and instability. Yet the Non-sensational styles as well as the neutral tone in the depiction of depiction of the most horrible and violent scenes re-enacts the symptoms of the trauma of the war. This can be better examined in the short story entitled "Osondu". The excessively "objective" non sensational

narrative style depicts a normal moment of social interaction which is annihilated in no time by the war machine:

> He held out his hand for a farewell. As the men's hands gripped again, an explosion followed a quick flash of light and flying shrapnel enveloped the world. Caught by surprise, the two men could not even duck as their hold on each other's hand tightened. When Osondu opened his eyes, Mike's head was gone... Osondu extricated himself from the handshake and dove into the bushes as Mike's headless body fell with a dull thud on the ground. (163)

The technique of "shock editing" within this paragraph constitutes along with the short story's condensed narrative space and linguistic minimalism helps to capture the moment of violence and destruction in its full intensity. At the same time, this "shot" is almost mechanically supplemented with another one where the instinctive survival reaction (Osundu's mechanic reaction of extracting himself and escape) represents the birth moment of the new subject. The horrors of war lie not in the violence itself but in the temporal condensation and dream- like effect produced by modern warfare instruments (mass destruction in a minimum amount of time) which lead to a-non-synchronized experience of, on the one hand the intensity and effect of violence and the minimal or null temporal duration of the violent action. Subsequently, such disjuncture produced with modern violence inhibits a fully cognitive development and response of the subject who is left with an extremely minimal narrative possibility (the event cannot be extended on real-time motion). War trauma is therefore embedded in the stories as the retrospective struggle with the "unintelligibility" of the violent moment as such, and the need to "extend" it over time (narrative) and space (language) which remains nonetheless fragmented and symbolically condensed yet constitutes an attempt to bridge the gap between what Kalu identifies as the "no way to understand war" and the historical need for a narrative to understand.

Kalu's collection of stories constitutes an amalgamation of different voices and experiences of the civil war at different spatial and temporal locations and as she argues "the stories are neither biography nor history, they are fictional accounts of the war experiences of ordinary people from the Biafra side of the war" (xxii). Kalu accounts for her choice of the genre to represent war experiences by referring to the fictional potential of the war itself in bringing drastic social and ideological changes experienced by the community and opening therefore up new imaginary or narrative spaces: "I was already aware of the possibilities of story when the war started (xxi). In the preface to the work, storytelling is introduced not as a pure fictional occupation but as a mode of public interaction and organization. The "legacy" of the story is traced as the vehicle through which the Igbo community engaged in narrative and hence historical self-fashioning. It is possible to understand then, that from the writer's (and the writer's ethnic background) perspective, narratives are necessarily intrinsic and "corporeal" in the community's life. Different Igbo writers such as Chinua Achebe share this vision and attachment to the story as an "escort", not only as the repository of the community's cultural heritage but as an instrument of historical change.

Yet, in converting these oral narrative apparatuses and traditions into written forms of literature, the writer is compelled to re-enact the possibility of a different story, a different mode of imagination into a larger "colonial" model of print culture. Therefore writing, as inevitable and as it was implanted, can be seen as a "threat" to this community's narrative-potential. One can discern a similarity at this level between the narrative conversion and the sociopolitical one that takes place in the colonial/postcolonial context. Both for Kalu and other Biafrans, the federal government's war on Biafra represent an early

form of breaking the national/narrative possibilities of the community. Hence, the broken or fragmented fictional possibilities and narrative lines are re-enacted in the writer's use of the short story as a written form of the war experience. Yet, as a space to represent the unfulfilled Biafra, the "shortness" of the stories also reflects the nature of the national project [of Biafra] as Szeman argues:

> It is a project that is necessarily short lived. For in the process of its first attempt to define space- an attempt that comes to be seen as somehow in-complete or that fails to account for more widespread organization of space in which the synchronic relationship of the nation to a whole international system is revealed. (8)

Moreover, the non-linear syncopated style of the different stories in the collection offers a powerful reminder of the interruptions and dissections in community life that accompanied and resulted from Biafra's own nationalism and war. As she explains it in remembering the war moments: "dead quite afternoons interrupted only by gunfire provided confusing contrasts that strained the imagination" (xxii). The war represents a "narrative impasse" through which the community had to live and during which fictional and imaginative practices were suspended and hence history itself arrested. This is why the writer asserts, at the end of her preface, that "there is no way of understanding war" which means, from a community or "ordinary" point of view and beyond factual and political analysis, war is a limbo, an impossible imaginative space.

On the other hand, Everything Good Will Come is structured around the realistic-development model of the buildungsroman. In opposition to Kalu's stories, the novel represents Atta's attempt to re-appropriate the genre which has been the main vehicle of postcolonial male nationalism. As Elleke Boehemer argues, "whether we look at its administrative structures or its policies, the new postcolonial nation is historically a male

constructed space, narrated into modern self consciousness by male leaders, activists, and writers" (22) Similarly, the novel's autobiographical, self conscious narratives of female protagonists psychological developments constitute attempts at representing and inscribing women's voices and experiences within national history.

At the aesthetic level, the bildungsroman represents a search of narrative continuity and "situatedness or "place" among the dominant male narratives of the nation. As Pheng Cheah explains:

> The nation qua predominant form of modern community lacks immediate unity. It is not merely a given, but a habitat one has to seek and affirm as one's proper home through national efferent. The bildungsroman is the most appropriate symbolic expression of this search because its fundamental premise is a self that is alienated from the world, a condition where meaning is no longer immanent but must be rationally posited by the seeker for [her]self. The bildungsroman provides the symbolic resolution to this homelessness. (245)

Applied to Nigerian women's novels, the genre is used to re-write the gaps of the national narrative by including gendered and feminized forms of alienation and absence of belonging or continuity. As Florence Stratton argues; "in certain respects the female bildungsroman stands in opposition to the entire African male literary tradition as developing, putting female subjectivity in process" (107).

Moreover, the narrative of the buildungsroman provides an allegorical mimesis to what Benedict Anderson calls the "autobiography of the nation" (201). For him, the "plotting of the novel" mimics the national "homogenous empty time" by "embedding" the "simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" (24) which the bildungsroman explores more prominently in the persona of the narrative protagonist. One of the main traditions of characterizing female protagonists in women's texts is what Florence Stratton

identifies as "the convention of paired women" (97). This technique used in the novel through the example of Sheri and Enitan doubles the narrative axis and provides a "juxtaposition of perspectives and perceptions" (98). By providing a double model of female psyche and development, the "social juxtaposition of two female characters who in their response to male domination are the antithesis of each other" (97) in <u>Everything Good Will Come</u> functions as a strategy to counter and nuance the western feminist echoes in Enitan's voice and limit the reader's identification of the main protagonist as a unified and monolithic model of female consciousness and subjectivity.

Chapter Two:
Narrating Violence and National Conflict: The Civil War in <u>Broken Lives and Other Stories</u>

National Instability from Independence to the Civil War

The passage from colonial to postcolonial states during independence inaugurates the modern nation and is often characterized by invisible yet immanent power clashes and tension. Politically and ideologically presented often as a unified and single event or symbolic birth, the moment of independence is however, differently and violently experienced within the different ethnic, economic and gendered lines of social identity. In attesting that: "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (29), Fanon traces the development of national consciousness during anti-colonial struggles to formulate a theory of colonial subjectivity which captures the violent heterogeneities of national identity and its revolutionary as well as destructive potential. The post-independence reversals of political power and the sharp discrepancies between nationalist leaders' discourses and political and social realities of the population constitute the primary level of ideological violence and tension but are often hidden or neutralized within homogenizing political narratives of the nation. Literary narratives which explore the Nigerian independence often express these hidden tensions in the form of disjunctive narratives and tense narrative consciousness and development.

Kalu's first story "Independence" is focalized through the narrative consciousness of a child, Nwada and reflects the troubles and anxieties of the small village community faced with an unintelligible historical event which remains undetermined till the end of the story. The girl's innocent questions about the shape, color, and size of "Independence" are voiced out in sharp contrast with the discursive abstractions of the adult world and political propaganda. Nwada's limited consciousness intensifies therefore, the notion of alienation as well as internal tension which culminates under the surface of the massive political event.

The child's inability to imagine Independence outside her "small" local daily life narrative displays the first level of disjuncture in the community between the unchanging material life of people and the politically "capitalized" event:

> But I do not understand this Independence. Everyone says that independence is coming and it is good. We children talk about it too. Who or what is it? Is it coming to visit? How long will she be here? Is she a relation of ours? (...) I will hide under Father's bed. I hid there once and no one was able to find me and neither will Independence. (6)

The voice of the child provides a counter narrative to the ongoing political paraphernalia which resists the dominant inscription of the event as "different" or new. Like the colonial encounter and institution, decolonization constitutes another "epistemological" impasse in the social imaginary of the community as an imposed "foreign" narrative. Subsequently, this serves to highlight the continuity and contiguity of colonial and postcolonial power structures which nationalist discourses seek to neutralize within rhetorics of newness. Like colonial power exhibitions performed by the old political authorities, nationalism as McClintock argues, "inhabits the realm of fetishism…it organizes the sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass in national commodity spectacle" (102). This is best illustrated through Nwada's simplistic but powerful analogy between the performances and the preparations (new uniforms, new songs) for "Independence Day" and the former yearly "rituals" of celebrating "Empire Day". Through her detailed and meticulous comparison of the two phenomena "last year/this year" "the marching and the salute are still the same"(8), she subverts the nationalist agenda of purity or novelty and shows how postcolonial nationalism is in fact a product and a substitution of the colonial logic it pretends to reverse.

Moreover, the cognitive and discursive gaps experienced by the children faced with the word "Independence" (old and new) constitute the second level of disjuncture in the process of national formation for the members of the community. The redundancy of the story's narrative through the deliberate repetition of both the words "Independence" and "new" reflects the circulations of abstract discursive labels as mechanisms of ideological and public management and control:

> Even the radio can't stop talking about it and the mammy wagons bring news of Independence every day. The women have a new hair style called Independence. A new kind of grass that grows fast covering every piece of earth it finds has been named the grass of Independence (...) for the past few months the teachers have been telling us to remember to wash our uniforms for Independence day.(...) everyone is getting ready for Independence to come to our town, to our school, and to the country. (8)

Indeed, modern African nationalist discourse of decolonization presents itself as synchronic and immediate, fixing the event of independence into one single temporal location which is then reworked not on the social real territory but on the imagined space of the colonial map. The abstractions of colonial imagined space which third world nationalism unquestionably reproduce represent the antithesis of Independence and hence the fall into neocolonial structures of dominance. Hence in the story, the event is put in slow motion, re-fragmented and the different layers of inconsistencies are captured in the fragmented territorial imaginary (house, town, school, country) of the people as well as their different cognitive and social positions (children, uneducated, poor,). Independence Day becomes the post-colonial moment of further alienation between systems of governance and local communities. At the same time the discursive and spatial disjunctions create a sense of delay which appears through the mood of lingering anticipation for

"tomorrow". The "delayed" independence constitutes the story's allegory of the national unfulfillment and instability and hence a prelude to its future in the civil war crisis.

The first story functions more however, as a medium to depict national formation tensions and violence as experienced by a limited or minor social consciousness. The narrative voice of Nwada is constantly juxtaposed with the larger narrative scale looming outside her perspective but which interrupts and threatens her. In this context the narrative voice registers the trauma through constant digression and repetition. The girl's nervous chatter and obsessive repetition of past stories whenever Independence is mentioned illustrates the absence of an adequate narrative or voice that can translate the "imagi-national" or cognitive crisis as well as the epistemological violence unarticulated within the process of national formation. The signs and discourses mentioned above (media, the masquerades, the flag...) violently disrupt the imaginative and hence self narrating process of the community suspending it from history and leaving it with only past memories and future fears: " 'keep quiet!' Elbuo is impatient. Although she knows the stories of March past I tell them to her again because I am worried about tomorrow" (4).

The second, sixth, and seventh stories in the collection reiterate the trope of insecurity more prominently by establishing the historical connections between the different moments from independence to the outbreak of the war. The snapshot shift from the world of school children in "Independence" to the little further developed world and narrative consciousness of teenage girls in the second story entitled "Angelus" also captures the narrative consciousness of crisis as the Covent girls are suspended in a "liminal" space between the colonial past and the troubled present with no access to an independent future. The girls' self-imagination is ironically reiterated within the continuity of colonial

narratives "our days were measured and full. We were happy. We were the promise that had been made to our great grandparents at colonization. We were Africa's future. We waited" (32).

The trope of anticipation or waiting through the suspension of events in narrative development is synonymous with the second epistemological impasse and instability that the war re-produces. This is even highlighted in "Children's Day" where the likewise limited narrative consciousness of Ngozi and Uzo converging and suspended in a single emotion of fear and are contrasted with the ongoing political discourse about war and nationalism and the shifting war lines. The story intensifies metaphorically the children's experience of unintelligibility and the unjustified absence of their parents into the metaphor of the war as a cognitive lapse. This is then powerfully juxtaposed to the general context of war blockade and starvation, which allows the writer to depict the simultaneity of imaginative, cognitive, and emotional "exhaustion" and depravity with hunger and shortage of food supplies:

> Alone in the house for the past two days, the children had exhausted their favorite games. Even Iheoma's inexhaustible energy supply was waning. And Uzo refused to acknowledge the question in her wide innocent brown eyes. His twelve year old mind raced ahead to the time when their parents would come home and answer Iheoma's questions. But only his fear was real. (107)

Likewise, in the story entitled "Obanje Father", the writer further develops the extended metaphor of loss of meaning and search for an intelligible narrative to the present war chaos through the juxtaposition of Igbo communal mythical narratives and consciousness. In this story ambiguity and unintelligibility surround the dramatic event which is the continuous death of Akuma's children. As Chikwenye Ogunyemi explains, the

figure of "*Ogbanje* refers to the iconoclast, the one who runs back and forth from one realm of existence to another, always longing for a place other than where s/he is. It also refers to the mystical, unsettled condition of simultaneously existing in several spheres" (quoted in Bryce, 62). Using the "Obanje" narrative in juxtaposition with modern medical and religious discourses, the writer portrays the native subject as caught into many contradictory discourses and systems of cultural interpretation which leads to his inability to reach a satisfactory or healing narrative. Similarly the dying children constitute another extended metaphor for the shortage of potential national future and generations due to the constant abductions of the nation through war and political conflicts:

> In twenty five years Akuma and his wives buried eleven children, as a youth he had had dreams of a large bustling compound, filled with children's laughter, the sound of small hands playing clapping games, he saw himself working hard during the planting season. He saw himself coming home from the farm and saying to one of his many healthy children, 'you come here'. That was a lifetime ago, before this war collided with his dreams. (124)

Ultimately, The Obanje as a polychromous narrative voice and consciousness is nonetheless countered and contained by colonial modern master narratives symbolized by the church and the hospital which violently intervene in the communal history. Kalu's allegoric re-constructions of the "Obanje" myth are brought to signify upon the question of Igbo nationalism which is metaphorically depicted as a short-lived experience contained by postcolonial federal power during the declaration of Biafra and through the civil war. The short-living children are signifiers of Biafra's unfulfilled history and promises serving therefore as aesthetic devices connecting the short narrative to the Igbo oral tradition. The genre of the story can be therefore seen as Obanje, a re-turning dead tradition of social

imagination and meaning which is liberated from the confinements of progressive or linear history as well as from the empirical shrinking space of the community.

War Violence and the Divided National Consciousness

The introductory stories of Kalu's collection are narratives of transition, metaphorically mimicking structures of power, sovereignty and legitimacy as related to the Nigerian state in the period between Independence and the outbreak of the civil war. The continuity traced between the colonial and postcolonial communal and national power mechanisms, the tensions between the different narrative voices and authorities enable the writer to portray the discontinuities and fragmentary nature of the Nigerian national consciousness as well as the political governance scene. Throughout the juxtapositions of the multiple social and political mechanisms of public life, the stories introduce what Donald Donham calls the "forms of sovereignty staked one upon the other" which define the postcolonial terrain of the new nation-state (22). This spatial metaphor of political power and organization offers a scheme to understand how, as Bhabha argues, "Nationalism embodies anti-nationalism in itself" (DissemiNation 4). The development of Biafran national consciousness and the federal government's recourse to violence during the war illustrate the different struggles to "legitimize" as well as annihilate competing powers and forms of sovereignty.

Starting from both Gellner's conceptualizing of national consciousness: "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (qtd in Anderson, 6), I argue that Biafran nationalism constitutes an "invented" but failed alternative form of national imagination and organization which rose from conflicting ethnic or "micro" power structures to claim and legitimatize an extended

"macro" political power acquisition. First it is important to differentiate between two types of national experiences within Biafra itself. In the context of the discrepancy between what Raph Ueche calls "the inflated personal politics of general Ojukuwu's Biafra" or what was promoted as official nationalism and the unofficial Igbo popular concern with communal security during the massacres following the second military coup in 1966. As a result of these conflicting configurations, the Biafra war was a double one in which the sovereignty fought for did not constitute a simple means for security, but an aim in itself (134).

It is at this moment when the definition and legitimacy of political power shifts and the nationalist leaders' discourse splits from the social and political needs and realities of the community. The transformation appears in the emptying of political power from any functional value whereby it becomes self-contained and self-legitimizing and at the same time non- or even dysfunctional. This shift which occurs halfway in the development of relatively "young" governing systems constitutes the abduction of politics and nationalism from within. For Ueshe, like larger Nigeria, Biafra represents the "genesis of failure" as "a failure of leadership" in comprehending the conflictual and disparate conceptions of national power and sovereignty (134). Subsequently, as Donham observes "In postcolonial Africa, patters of violence developed not only as national elites played games of winner take all but also as the forms of actually existing sovereignty came into collision" (22).

On the other hand, this failure is also to be understood as a cognitive and imaginative one related to the capacities of social and political self imagination and identification. This failure is again to be linked to both colonial and postcolonial power structures and containment of alternative sign systems and cultural practices. As Partha Chatterjee complains:

> Autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state. Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state. (222)

Only in this context thus, can the postcolonial moment in literary writing's renewed preoccupation and experimentation with the nation be understood as a crisis of self-representation and as an active exercise in developing other modes of expression beyond the persistent colonial imaginary. One possible alternative to generic and narrative restrictions in the postcolonial national representations of the nation is proposed by Anthonia Kalu in <u>Broken lives and Other Stories</u> as a return to a communal narrative and imagination through storytelling to better represent and bear witness to this crisis.

Yet at the same time, the short story recreates what Obi Nwakanma calls "the sense of an unfinished nationhood" (8). In postcolonial African countries like Nigeria, where anti-colonial and nationalist ideology was forged not only by political activists and discourse, but also as a cultural project by a large number of intellectuals and writers, the collapse of the political form of the federation that sought to unite the ethnic and cultural differences soon after independence in the Biafra war embodies the earliest failure of the postcolonial nation as a narrative of both spatial unity and temporal infinity. The stories' ambivalent narratives and open-endedness reenact the "a logic of secession" to use Kenneth Harrow's words, from the politics of novelistic conventions discussed in the previous chapter as contributing to the myths of transcendence and infinity of the nation.

This secession constitutes the material limit or breaking point of the imaginary (or imagined) as discourses circulating inside/outside the community (whether literary or

critical) as well as the related practices (political, economic, cultural...) which are shaped by and shaping these discourses. The moment of secession is generated at yet not confined to the discursive level. As with national federal discourse and ideology, Biafra as a potential nation comes from the process of an imagined "sub-community". With the difference of Nigeria (the federation), Biafra reconstructs the ethnic and linguistic factor as a vehicle for the spatial and political session and therefore as a form of identity and a frame for the dissident nation. As Chimalum Nwankwo argues, dissidence is the tool through which changes are articulated: "Whenever transformation becomes necessary in human society, it must begin with some kind of alteration of an internal cartography" (195). In this respect, and given the fictional or literary element, the texts that deal with these movements do not simply reflect material and historical events but capture the shift at its primary fictional moment. As Imre Szeman explains about nationalist writers such as Achebe or Soyinka in "The Novel after the Nation: Nigeria after Biafra":

> One of the main reasons, it seems to me that the outcome of the Biafran conflict does not point for either writer to the impossibility of the Nigerian nation and the need for different modes of political life, is that they read Biafra to some degree as a sign of aesthetic failure: the failure of the novel to accomplish the task that only it can carry out. In their shared antipathy towards nativism and their insistence on the inevitability of modernity, the nation becomes as inviolable as the principle of political life. (119)

Szeman criticizes these writers for the fact that, in their turn, they conflate and imagine the nation as an already available discourse and literary possibility, as a formal potential *à la lettre* (the novel as a genre) rather than questioning its immediate political "(im)possibility". Hence, the post-Biafra literature in these cases remained largely modern [and modernist] in its imaginary lamenting the formal chaos and longing for cultural and political order through the nation and misreading these changes. For Szeman the continuity

of the genre after the end of Biafra is synonymous with the lingering of inadequate forms of national imagination as well as a relative inability -in fiction as well as in politics- to imagine alternative and more appropriate modes of cultural, political and historical interaction.

Gender Violence and New Subject Formations

In the stories, the violent redrawing of national cartography begins with the constantly shifting and undifferentiated war fronts which invaded civilian spaces such as villages and houses. In transgressing and breaking physical, psychic, and imaginary communal boundaries, war produces as Achille Mbemebe observes "new subjectivities" (36). Ranging from the child soldier, the widow, the orphans, and the war refugees emerge as elements of this new cartography of national crisis. Although originally destabilized and even in some case disabled, these subjects' develop strategies of coping with social and political instability which profoundly affects their psyches. Fanon argues that one of the major effects of collective violent experiences is the development of national consciousness itself which arises as result of violence a form of mutual and collective recognition between the natives. (73) Throughout the stories, however, Kalu problematizes the notion of consciousness in relation to violence whereby the new dislocated community oscillates between a double narrative and consciousness, between the unforgotten "broken" life and the new undetermined options of living. Subsequently, the recurrent dreams of coming home or going back in time into a period of stability function as double narrative strategies dialecticizing the temporal and spatial development of national consciousness.

In the second story, "Angelus", war violence destabilizes and puts an end to "the task of turning generations of teenage African girls into proper young women, ladies of

tomorrow" (27). In this particular context, the war intervenes with the educational institution and arrests the process of Biafra's "native elite" formation within the Christian missionary schools that continue to operate as "nongovernmental" neocolonial power networks within the boundaries of the nation-state. As the school is destroyed and closed, the privileged education of the upper class in comparison to "other girls who could not afford the catholic mission" (31) is undermined and the "cosmopolitan" dreams of the girls "of joining the rest of the world as it progressed to better things" (42) is displaced by the violence of the real and local environment. The open-endedness of the narrative ironically hints to the re-turn of these girls to equal local experiences of depravity and insecurity like other children. As she directly experiences violence during an air raid that destroys the mission, the protagonist suddenly remembers her grandmother's and aunts' "caution" about the dangers of education which exceeds the needs of local community formation "don't learn more than we need" (42). And finally, as she leaves the destroyed school, however, she realizes the end of those identity projects and hence, the subsequent shift in her own consciousness, social position, and social relations:

> But somehow I couldn't wave. I realized that I couldn't recognize anyone among the sad, unfriendly faces of my schoolmates. It was not that I didn't know their names, I did. But I did not know them. None of them smiled or waved at me as the jeep took me though the school gates. (43)

Camwood retells a quasi similar story of the teenage girl's career, education and life as endangered and broken by the war exigencies and the new social structures resulting from it. Faced with the war insecurity, as Shani D' Cruze and Anupama Rao explain, "gender" becomes "a form of vulnerability" (4) with the susceptibilities of rape and abuse by soldiers. The community (represented by Ulomma's mother) re-defines and re-sets

gender politics and roles whereby the female subject, due to economic inability to provide for her education or fear of her "being stranded and unable to get married, is pushed back into the recesses of the domestic. As Meredeth Turshen explains, marriage and domesticity represent "a strategy of protecting women during wartime" (15). Similarly the process of Ulomma's gender training within the domestic institution of marriage is symbolically reflected in the painful and exhausting grinding and wearing of camwood. Both in its color and texture, camwood symbolizes the violent and painful "initiation" into womanhood in the war context: "grinding camwood was strenuous, detailed work... like a girl's life, it was difficult at best, and the war was not helping the matter" (74-75).

As a protagonist, Ulomma presents a high degree of self and gender consciousness in understanding and analyzing how the use of gender within the nationalist agenda and during war insecurities rigidly re-divides and enables the division and segregation of social space between a strictly military male public one, and a strictly female or domestic one, reinforcing the restriction of women's public lives and potential careers but also co-opting and displacing masculine identity to the war front :

> Some of the boys they had gone to school with are now batten in the Emergency army. Their parents were not afraid that they would get pregnant outside marriage... in fact everybody in Biafra was encouraging young men to join the army militia...why did the army or an army uniform produce different perceptions about young girls and young men of the same age even in the middle of this war in which all died equally from bullets and bombs. Girls in uniforms were perceived as potential harlots while young men in uniforms were perceived as potential heroes. (75)

Both camwood and the army uniform paradoxically represent different yet equally gendered and violent symbols of identity in wartime. As D'Cruze and Rao argue: "violence often constitutes (paradoxically) the conditions of possibility for making gendered

subjectivity legible even as it enables the production of sexed vulnerability" (5). Hence, Ulomma's final dead image as drowned in blood and camwood after the failed abortion is contrasted to her brother/lover's army enrollment to show how in fact, women and men do not "die equally from bombs and bullets" (75), but rather of the implications of the gender embodiments of hegemonic cultural values, institutional power practices, and unequal social opportunities. Like other stories, the open-endedness of "Camwood" paradoxically forms a closed narrative where the tragic end of Biafra's nationalism -unknown only from the limited protagonist's view- reiterates the futility of the gender and national constructions while the open ended stories subvert the nationalist gender agenda embodied in the romanticized military promises and "potential" heroic narratives for the young Biafran men.

In some stories however, other symbolic depictions of the violent transformation of militaries and civilians alike appear through mutilation, family fragmentation and child death. "The Last Push" introduces Chika's anxiety and ambivalent feelings towards her husband's new identity and the possible end of their marital status:

> Her first question to the bringers of peace would be about her husband. Where was he? No, not the man who would come back from the war but the man she married. The one she lost during the first year of the war... she would have to live with a war ravaged stranger pretending she cared for and understood the new person they had trained to kill.... How can a woman who never wanted to marry a soldier live with an ex-soldier? (58)

The return of the mutilated husband constitutes a metaphor for the altered and dismembered subject of the war. The lost arm represents the embodiment of violence and inevitability of change and hence the impossibility of reconciliations with or resuming of an old identity. Similarly the death of baby Ofor in "Children's Day" alters the Okafor

family's structure and experience forever. Whereas in "Broken Lives", the experience of war gender violence and rape by the soldiers transform the lives of women.

The protagonist and other women in the story of "Broken Lives" complain about the double nature of violence experienced by women during war; "the night raids continued. Nneoma's sadness deepened; it was as if the war had not ended. "Take heart, my daughter" said Ejituru. "This is the war of the women". Nneoma disagreed. "But we fought the war with everyone else" (95). The story, however, does not represent the women, who have been subject to this violence as victims but rather as victimized within a social structure. The interesting example of Aliezi's refusal to return to her husband and of Nneoma's similar decision at the end of the story constitute a powerful resistance to what Irina Anderson and Kathy Doherty Call rape supportive culture and rape denying discourse. By refusing to "return" to their earlier mode of life these women challenge the romantic reconciliatory tropes of their patriarchal community. The patriarchal attempts at order restoration after the war do not only fail to "account for" the violence and painful experience of women, but function through camouflaging or erasing these experiences through the rhetorics of shame and silence. The story of Aliezi's exemplifies how women's rejections of the patriarchal compromise go to the extent of actively "embracing" the new status or subject position:

> Aliezi had decided to stay with the soldiers. That first night the peace soldiers had almost eaten her alive. She didn't know how many of them were there…Her husband wanted her back. He said he didn't care what had happened; she was his wife. Aliezi refused. How could she put that night behind her? She told her mother she cannot go back home and live as if nothing had happened. (96)

The story powerfully "unlearns" the patriarchal narrative codes by reversing the "shame" and "silence" codes of behavior for women and inscribing their refusal to return as resistance to the normalization and forgetting the violent rape experiences.

These new subject positions which women experience outside the institution of marriage are conditioned and limited, however, by their potential participation and co-option in the larger structure of a nascent capitalist economy embodied in the reference to the market. The women described as inhabiting "the market" constitutes a metaphor of the commodification and of female sexuality through sex work or prostitution. The symbolic "passage' of women from the monopoly of marriage and wifehood to the anarchic and "nomad' trajectories available at the market constitute an early sign of the global transitions awaiting the community at the end of the war and the whole postcolonial nation after independence. In this respect, it is possible to see how the Biafra war acts as a precursor to the new global era by providing a suitable disrupted and fluid geography that facilitates the circulation of capital and cultural forms. This is brilliantly echoed in the story "Relief Duty" where the shift in the protagonist's name from Monika to "money" symbolically reenacts the process of capitalist conversion of social institutions. Literally a personification of capital, Money's constant "circulation" and complex trajectory across the troubled Nigerian territory is related to her involvement with "international" and foreign missions. Moreover and in her paradoxical extreme poverty and torn shoes, Money represents the disposed or subaltern subject in the traffic of global powers and interests through which "relief duty" discourses are mediated. On a third level, Money (the character) can be seen as representative of the nation itself through its constantly changing name and affiliations (foreign policy/local affairs).

Likewise, children's experiences during and after the war provide them with an awareness of the new invisible and deterritorialized powers which operate through social and institutional disorder. In "Children's Day", Uzo is constantly alert to the sounds and the radio's morning warning/greeting:

> Children of Biafra
> Do not sleep
> One whom enemies surround
> Guards his life at all times
> ... The time is eight o'clock! (106)

The child's limited cognition, which is a reminder of the protagonist of the first story about independence, makes him recast or reflect the tension that "exceeds" his consciousness. But although s/he does not absorb or consciously interiorize the discursive propaganda, they double and magnify its affective dimension echoed by the nervous and constant repetition of the oral slogan. Because of the inaccessibility of other media and cultural forms to children, the radio talk constitutes a suitable space where indirect yet immediate children-targeted cultural ideologies and control operate. As a moment of enunciation and therefore of subject formation, the interpellation "Children of Biafra" is "ritually" rehearsed through repetition on a fixed temporal axis. At the same time, these calls' deterritorialized and virtual auditory voice (the radio waves) easily penetrates within the orally structured community and the auditory patterns of the child's imagination. Hence, and ironically due to their limited discursive understanding and consciousness, the children are easily subjectified and manageable by nationalist propaganda through the "affective" or non cognitive effects of terror and insecurity it creates and circulates. The radio therefore constitutes a political structural device and a site of public affective violence exercised on the community's imagination

Along with the different instances and impacts of violence on the disruption and reconstruction of social and political identity , many of Kalu's stories especially, "Broken Lives", "The Last Push", "Relief Duty" and "The Gift" display different instances of gender politics' ambivalent "interlocking of national concepts and signifiers of femininity" (Boehemer 5). As I have tried to illustrate above, Female characters as well as the narrative pattern and tropes within each story serve not only to determine how women are imagined and constructed as citizens in the national or war context but also to better elucidate, in Obioma Nnaemeka's terms, "how the imaginaries" themselves, are "located" or "gendered" (2).

In order to efficiently understand the figure of the mother, and as Nnaemeka argues, motherhood should not be restricted to the "the patriarchal" institution but understood as "an experience". Instead of the abstract, fixed and "universalist' concept of motherhood, Nnaemeka proposes to focus on the material process of "mothering" and engendering life, within particular historical contexts in order to account for the complexity and instability of gender as a way of imagining and materially constructing collective identity. Similarly, I read Kalu and Atta's re-construction of mothering through the different genres of short stories and the bildungsroman as engaging with the political and aesthetic potential lack of collectivity within and beyond the nation or as Szeman notes "the way in which the texts and contexts of the postcolonial also speak to the problem of the collective" (18-19).

Ways out of gender stigmatization and victimization appear through the different mother characters in the stories. In Kalu's texts, two different visions of the mother can be delineated. "The Last Push", "Camwood", and "Broken Lives" show how the war context with its intensified nationalist ideology, both masculinity and femininity are used to create a

social structure suitable for the work of the nationalist war machine by assigning oppositional gender roles to women and men respectively as fighters in the army and as children producer and caretakers in the compound. In this context, metaphorical discourse about motherhood as an organizing social and political device produces an "organic" unified image of the community and enables it to imagine itself as an extended, politics-free family rather than a political power-structure. As a result, nationalism de-politicizes discourse in relation the imagined domestic or maternal national space (the private) and composedly redirects and intensifies politics and power into one hegemonic space of action which is the nationalist government or army (the public). On a second level this imaginary is replicated in the construction and control of women lives as real mothers within the community as the "bio-political" institution of motherhood becomes a technology of power and control of the heterogeneous realities of mothers' experiences. Kalu's stories reflect but at the same time reverse this passage of power through the aesthetic use of "mothering" as a dynamic and unfinished process of creation and regeneration instead of motherhood as an institution, as the metaphor for the nation-in-process.

In "The Last Push", and "Broken Lives", large narrative portions of the stories meticulously follow the trajectory of mothers as family breadwinners and protectors during the war. The description of Chika's character subverts both nationalist standards (her refusal of her husband's war involvement) and the mythical Penelope figure that depicts women as passive and loyal wives and mothers. Seen as 'compulsory' or natural within the concept of motherhood, women's role in holding together the community and hence their particular different experiences of the war often remain unacknowledged. Moreover, women's resistance and struggle against the weapon of starvation used by the federal

government is contrasted to hegemonic patriarchal structures that limit and obscure their agency. Chika's defiance of the social system and her transgression of the boundaries of the territory behind war fronts in search of food constitute Kalu's aesthetic restoration of that "broken" or lost agency:

> But her absence meant only one thing: she had gone to the peace soldiers. She was a harlot. By early afternoon, mothers began to call their children away from Nwaku. Udo's friends did not invite her to bathe in the stream. Nne was worried. Sending Chika to school had been her idea. Her husband had warned her that book learning would ruin their family... (59)

In "Broken Lives" the war curfew and constant shift of war fronts is most damaging to women's economic role and financial independence. Because of the war, women's trade stopped and their role as family provider is restricted. Yet, ironically, women engaging in the economic struggle like Chika are the ones who "declare" the end of war and reclaim the economic order. Chika's rush to restore her economic and social power shows the role of women in the awakening and development of the damaged local economy. After the deportation of her husband into the army service, Chika and many women find themselves "single" mothers as well as unprotected women exposed to the dangers of physical abuse basically rape by soldiers. In fact, rape in the different stories act as a metaphor for war to subvert the patriarchal nationalist family rhetoric of protection in relation to female characters. This is illustrated in the case of "Camwood"'s violent incest story, where the very social structure that Biafran nationalism is in the process of establishing is endangering not only for the women but also for the whole community. Moreover, mothering is de-sanctified and shown in many cases as violent and compulsory through rape and aftermath pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancy "breaks" the possibilities of life, social success and self-fulfillment for women and hence limits their potential as women-citizens

as they end up either dead after abortion like Ulomma, or losing their career like her mother in "Camwood". In other instances, gender violence during wartime undermines the social institution of "motherhood" as in the case of Iliezi and other women taken by the soldiers.

In addition to these subversive female figures in Kalu's work, some stories ambivalently reiterate the nationalist metaphor of mother-as-nation. In "The Last Push", the death of Mama Stella is described as follows; "Chika cried for Mama Stella, for herself, and for a nation gone berserk in its search for Peace and Unity" (55). In her last story "The Gift", the same metaphor of the woman/mother nation works through the image of the narrator's mother longing for a child while "her tall comely frame began to droop in anticipation of unfulfilled womanhood" (174). Yet the metaphor of the child as a gift to the mother disrupts the economist affiliation of motherhood with the patriarchal national system as population production.

Kalu's last story, therefore, inscribes the mother as a desiring and active subject in the narrative and the child as a self-reflexive process of fulfillment. By establishing the different connections between the past, the present and the future voices, the child is the actualization and an extension of the mother herself through which she reappropriates the mothering potential and hence her "ownership" of her offspring. The gift, being for and from the mother at the same time, becomes a metaphor of the organic autonomy and self-reconstructive powers of motherhood. The story offers a paradigm which restores, as Nnaemeka suggests, the othered subject within the experience of mothering in the war and hegemonic nationalism which is the mother herself:

> My life is a small prayer beyond my mother's expectations. She had prayed hard for a child ... imagines her joy when I came along. Onyinye she called me-"Gift". Over the years she called forth the gift in me ... "no my child, you do not have a gift. You are a gift given to everyone you meet. You will bear untold gifts to those who ask... I am a poor woman and can give you nothing except the words of ancestors. (174)

Towards the story's end, the different conflictual narratives about the nation and the mother are intensified though the dialogue between the child and the mother, which constitutes a self- reflexive technique of the story working with and trying out the positive possibilities within the existing or even violent discourses. What Kalu proposes through the narrative voice of the "gift" child is both a critical narrative synthesis of the country's history that does not fall into the hegemonic symbolic "masculinity" or "fatherhood" of nationalist discourse through a blatant sweeping of the war realities and heterogeneous experiences. Subsequently this synthesis or multiple consciousnesses embodied by the child symbolizes the process of national formation as an open and continuous struggle for a positive and self-conscious collectivity rather than partition or ideological false homogenous consciousness.

Ultimately, As Boehmer argues, it remains perfectly politically possible and perfectly legitimate (and not belated) to theorize collectivity from and within the existing narrative modes or "aesthetics" because even wars and crises also provide a "widening" of the imaginary and bring about new experiences of collectivity and communal resistance. Kalu's mother-nation constitutes then, a literal rather than a metaphoric possibility of collectivity since it is materially actualized by the strength and survival involved in the "mothering", not only as an individual gendered experience, but also as a line of continuity and hence collectivity through the different experiences of the war by Biafran women. The collectivity in the stories is re-enacted in the process of re-claiming not only the fragmented

parts of "broken lives" but also the lines of bonding and resistance which develop in these historical moments to sustain and constitute potential future possibilities for the communities.

Chapter Three:

Violence in Private and Public: Post-Civil War Nigeria in <u>Everything Good Will Come</u>

Militarism and Structural Gender Violence

The narrative of <u>Everything Good Will Come</u> begins around the end of the civil war and the advent of the relatively prosperous seventies in Nigeria and unfolds across the last three decades' political upheavals. As far as the civil war is concerned, the novel attributes little space to refer to the event. As Jane Bryce observes, despite her education, Enitan displays a limited historical knowledge in relation to the "foundational crisis" of the civil war which remains "shadowy and tangential" (64):

> "It was terrible that we'd had different experiences of the Civil War. In university, I finally acknowledged the holocaust that was Biafra, through memoirs and history books, and pictures of limbless people; children with their stomachs, bloated from kwashiorkor and their rib cages as thin as leaf veins [. . .] atrocities of the human spirit that only a civil war could generate, while in Lagos we had carried on as though it were happening in a different country. (86)

Enitan's condensed reflections do not only acknowledge the violent historical moment and the tragedy of the Igbo deaths during the war. At the same time, she problematizes the notion of a collective or single national history and experience by collapsing the very principle of "homogenous and simultaneous" national time and hence one of the novelistic premises and conventions itself. In this sense, Enitan's "historical" ignorance challenges the realist novel panoptical convention of the all knowing, all witnessing protagonist by showing the limitations of one's social or local environment and position even within the same national boundaries as delineated in the first chapter of this study, Atta's writing within the genre of the novel is also at many time about the genre, revising and contesting its "western" or bourgeois premises.

In this respect, the writer presents her narrative and protagonist within a crisis of representation and situated on an ambivalent limited position in relation to the violent

events and experiences occurring at the macro-historical level of nationalist politics and discourses. Enitan's own biases and privileges hinder her from establishing historical continuities with what's happening around her or "over there" in other places of the country, and as a result she is constantly experiencing material detachment and massive frustration and disillusionment in regard to normal daily life matters which she cannot assimilate. Hence, although she recognizes some forms and patterns of violence in social and political structures, she remains unable neither to express the specific historical connections which making it possible nor powerfully reverse or resist it.

Such limited narrative consciousness is therefore strategically shown as the result of larger centralized narratives of power and totalitarian ideologies which violently and systematically act upon social identity and consciousness. The major form of centralized power in Nigeria is the rise of military nationalism from the civil war onward. As Falola underlines, "The civil war gave power to the military" as the failure of Biafra reinforced the "centralization of political authority" (38). In this respect, the formal cutting down of the novel's narrative into specific chapters with, to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, "calendarial A. D dates" (204) corresponding to the major military coups[2] serves to show how political and military violence intercepts and alters personal psychic and social development as symbolized by the bildungsroman and autobiographical narrative voice of Enitan.

Political power structures function in public as well as in private. The violence within political practice affects not only the macro-social structure but also individual psyche's and identities. As I have suggested in the first chapter of this study, depending on their particularly gendered nature, nationalist ideologies and political power structure work

to reinforce or break the actual power structures within society. By eradicating the differences between the so called "private' or domestic violence, and the state or military one, women writers explore the way the nation is made "private" first through the gendering of social relations within the family. In this part, I intend to examine, to use McClintock's phrase, "how nationalism is implicated in gender power" (89) through the example of the family as the most prone social formation where gender politics as well as the macro structures of power are reenacted into private or domestic ones.

The family constitutes one of the major tropes in national imagination. Nations, as McClintock argues, "are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space" (90), whereby the family becomes the naturalizing and legitimizing metaphor of political structures as well as a genesis narrative for these structures. (91) Conceptions of the family are however complicated by the colonial historical and ethnic background of Nigeria. In her reflection upon the complexities of the marriage systems, Enitan wonders:

> But how successful were civil marriages meanwhile? Couples bound by legal certificates, confused by romantic love. If this was a country struggling with religious and government structures imposed on us, it was also a country struggling with foreign family structures. (247)

Enitan's family model corresponds to what Nira Yuval Davis identifies as emblematic of the novel as a genre, the depiction of the "bourgeois family morality" (24) which becomes synonymous with colonial and postcolonial modernity in relation to the "primitive" social structures and organization of the native. The romantic western family model constitutes a violent displacement and imposition of patriarchal and restrictive notions of husbandry and wifehood, parenting, as well as child raising. These hegemonic models often constitute

repressive and hegemonic state apparatuses of implementing order and maintaining power as in the case of the civil marriage questioned by the protagonist. To better exemplify the colonial and violent nature of civil law and family structure imposed by the state, Enitan's reflection is textually situated within the story of the polygamous family of the Bakare and the gender empowering status of both Mama Gani and Mama Kudi the co-wives of Sheri's father. (247-45)

Frantz Fanon, as McClintock explains, "[he] rejects the western metaphor of the nation as family" because he "reads familiar normality as a product of social power indeed of social violence" (93). Fanon's criticism of nationalist discourse helps to analyze and determine the underlying violence of social structures of the anti-colonial and subsequently the post-colonial order. Similarly, in the aftermath of the civil war and the context of military rule, Nigerian society can be seen as a product of these violent patterns which are described by Meredeth Turshen: "War creates militarized societies and an elaborate ideology of gender roles links masculinity to militarism armed forces [as] archetypal patriarchal institutions"(6). This results in the "social institutionalization of the military" or the militarization of society (5). Militarization as Jacklyn Cock defines it, "involves mobilization for war through the penetration of the military, its power and influence, into more and more social arenas until the military have a primacy in state and society" (7). This means that inner or autonomous social bodies and orders are dramatically intercepted and changed by military power. According to Turshen, and relevant to the Nigerian political scene as represented in Atta, militarization constitutes a strategy of governance when political deficiency is at its height: "too many politically weak African governments stay in power by increasing militarization...by escalating the level of state sponsored violence" (6)

How does the militarization of society affect gender relations within the family? According to Bayo Ogunjimi, this question is often ignored in feminists work and texts in the context of African societies. Military rule works through facilitating the discursive and ideological "masculinzation of the state apparatuses" (28) which results in the reinforcement of patriarchal structures within social practice. The stories of the breakup of the Taiwo family and Enitan's as well as other women's marriage conflicts are juxtaposed to and interrupted by the climate of dictatorship, threat, and insecurity on the level of the state. Consequently, Atta's narrative draws the parallel between the gendered state structures and the case of domestic politics.

Additionally, as Jeff Hern argues, "Political performance has been the most obvious way to show masculinity and machismo. The father figure is becoming transubstantiated into the body of the state, the professions and law" (qtd in Ogunjimi, 29). This can be illustrated through Enitan's father Sunny Taiwo. As a lawyer with presumed political activism and democratic agenda, the father is ironically subverted as the novel shows the contradiction between his liberal political agenda and "home" or domestic behavior as a misogynist adulterous husband and an authoritarian indoctrinating father controlling his daughter's life. One of the novel's passages ironically juxtaposes two topics of conversation between Enitan and her father, the first conversation being political about the affairs of the state and the still unfulfilled democratization of Nigeria after "twenty five years after independence", and the second about the private affair of the property transfer of the family house to Enitan's mother which is remains undone "in ten Years!". (108-9) Both situations are literally and metaphorically paralleled to the political debate about democracy claimed at the level of state politics yet denied in the private or domestic space (108-9)

Subsequently, women's rights, womanhood and motherhood become "endangered" within these structures As Bayo Ogunjimi delineates, "social and cultural alienation relating to mothering, child caring… is engendered by the imposition of the [patriarchal] military on the family and the state" (30). First, restrictive and limiting ideas of motherhood under patriarchal structures are equated with the violent power strokes of the military coups and suspension of constitution and rights which restrict the freedom and multiple forms of identity and citizenship:

> From childhood people had told me I couldn't do this or that, because no one would marry me and I would never become a mother. Now I was a mother…I alone had beaten my thoughts down. No one else had done that. I believer in infinite capabilities, up to a point; self reliance, depending. It was internal sabotage, like military coups. (326)

Similarly, Enitan's patriarchal stance in relation to her mother constitutes one of the effects of patriarchy negatively affecting the mother-daughter relationship:

> You talk about your father, but never your mother' a daughter was not meant to be at odds with her mother especially an only child. Our mothers were wonderful, mostly, they shielded us from the truths about our fathers, remained in bad marriages to give us a chance. But I'd seen, met, heard of daughters who admitted their mothers were vain, weak, bullying, sluttish. drunken. The difference between these daughters and I was that I did not know my mother, and had kept our lack of relationship hidden, often lied about. (88-9)

Also, the maternal body becomes the site where the infirmities and disorders are metaphorically recast as a confined national mothering geography. This appears especially through compulsory motherhood as practiced within marriage. As Lauretta Ngcobo explains in "African Motherhood: Myth and Reality", marriages constitute, contrary to the western tradition "a relationship between two groups not just two people" where the status of the woman/mother is put in "double Jeopardy" before and after motherhood. (534)

Motherhood is not only compulsory, but its meaning and practice is caught between traditional patriarchal social structures and between colonially inherited visions. This offers a double reading pattern for a number of events related to mothering such as Enitan's series of miscarriages. Both at the private and public levels, motherhood failures and insecurities can be read as a trope for both the family and the state's failure to engender social and political equality and hence healthy gender relationships.

Yet, if motherhood and mothering function as community narratives or sites for reclaiming authority, collectivity and alternative historical and aesthetic modes of representation across national fragmentation, Everything Good Will Come represents a different story of motherhood alienation and discontinuous development of women as mothers. As Florence Stratton calls it, the novel uses the "Death of the Mother" (94) trope through the representation of many failed mothering experiences as well as of failed mother-child relationships. Hence Atta presents this continuity as endangered within the post-civil war context of political instability and military violence. Hence, the loss of the mother trope becomes symbolic of the imaginational and creative as well as social discontinuity created by violence and power.

Equally, and following Jane Bryce's reading of the figure of the *abiku* child in the third generation Nigerian novel (49), the death of mother/child constitutes one of the Atta's major tropes translated as a form of haunting or "spectral consciousness" for the main character to use Pheng Cheah's term, (386). In Enitan's own words:

> I was lucky to have survived what I believed I wouldn't, the smell of my mother's death. I couldn't remain as I was before, otherwise my memory of her would be in vain and my survival would certainly be pointless. Anyone who experienced such a trauma would understand. The aftermath could be a reincarnation. One life was gone and I could either mourn it or begin the next. How terrifying and sublime to behave like a god with the power to revive myself. This was the option I chose. (333)

This passage identifies the discontinuous social experiences of motherhood which are symbolically restituted in a presence/absence or inside/outside dialectic to show the outcast state of these relationships in the violent patriarchal state and national imaginary. As Atta's protagonist explains about the connections and disconnections between her mother's death and her new experience of motherhood, the sense of loss and endangerment acquires continuity from one generation to the other. Atta establishes therefore a "ghostly" maternal genealogy which becomes a synonym for the gendered materialities as well as imaginaries excluded from the national practices and agenda. Yet ironically these nationally un-authorized forms of identity and experience weight upon and determine the very nature of dominant social and national imaginaries as double and ambivalent and hence as inherently unstable. In the novel, this is enacted through Enitan's family breakups which are depicted as part of a larger historical continuity between colonial and post-colonial instabilities and conflicts.

Narrative Techniques and Metaphors of National Disorder

Within the major effects of political and gender violence on the different psychic and social formations in Nigeria during military rule, this part focuses specifically on the gendered experience of psychic disorder for women through the embodiment of the public and private tensions into specific forms of bodily disorders. I read the gendered embodiment of crises and violent structures as a strategic trope of re-inscribing women's

gendered agencies through the material/body within national and political discourse to counter and subvert the metaphorical ellipsis of these agencies through male assimilationist tropes.

These "nervous embodiments" can be traced through different strategies. First, at the narrative level, this entails the re-working of notions of narrative consciousness, voice as well as characterization. Embodying or re-projecting the political and ideological conflict onto the self produces the different forms of complex narrative consciousness discussed in the first chapter such as double or split subjects and discourse. On a second level, the strategic uses of discursive tropes and the body politics of what Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good calls "diagnostic language" (10) related to psychiatry help to translate the different levels of national/gender crises in the post-colonial African state. The incorporation of feminist and psychoanalytic discourses offers different and new ways to imagine patterns of agency for female characters in the novels.

In Everything Good Will Come, the recurrence of two major diseases, neurosis and dyspepsia (indigestion), constitutes a central metaphor of the embodiment of violence and disorder or the interrelatedness between psychic and body politics and the power hierarchies within the state. These powers invisible mechanisms and tensions are made visible through the material/physical disease symptoms which are at use in the novel. In this sense, I argue that the novel tries to free and "clean out" imaginaries of national space and political action through fictional "indigestion" or the "vomiting up" to use Fanon's metaphor of violent anti-colonial resistance (35) the different tensions that take place during the post civil war Nigeria.

As Shani D' Cruze and Anupama Rao explain, notions of embodiment and bodily intimacy are socially constructed, and within the context of modern totalitarian nation states, "intimacy is increasingly policed" (8). Within this policing of individual and social bodies by the state's power, "structural and gendered embodiment" often becomes "a disabling condition" (9). Everything Good Will Come depicts various forms of gender and political policing. Told in the first person narrative of Enitan, who allegedly complains from repression and oppression the story moves from the protagonist's unconscious acceptance and internalization of gender stereotypes and structures to a self-conscious assessment of her own agency when she discovers that in her case, these ideologies are only carried out through self-policing and repression. As she explains:

> I had opportunities to take action, only to end up behaving in ways I was accustomed, courting the same old frustrations because I was sure of what I would feel: wronged, helpless, stuck in a day when I was fourteen years old. Here it is: changes came after I made them, each one small. (332)

Yet self-policing entails the internalization of gender stereotypes and is therefore contingent upon the larger dominant cultural system of signification. Gendered notions not only of accepted behavior but also through the internalized self-image of one's bodily existence are often distorted or dictated through a logic of "discipline and punish". This appears in Enitan's reflection upon notions of beauty and desirability: "I was glad that I was not pretty. Prettiness could encourage people to treat a woman like a doll, to be played with, tossed around, fingered, dismembered, and discarded. Prettiness could also make a woman lazy" (105). In this twisted logic, Enitan ends up constructing a victimizing and restrictive image to Sheri as "a kitchen martyr "the Nigerian man's ideal" (105).

As it is clear from the reference to Sheri's rape, hegemonic social and gender codes invisibly work to categorize and transform the violence and illegitimacy of rape into legitimate punishment for "bad girls". This results in the restriction of possibilities for social justice for women which parallels the restriction of their rights and their space of agency within the national frame. As it appears in the text through Enitan's sexual trauma and obsessive fear of the outside world, and as Susan Bordo argues: "the symptomatolgy of these disorders reveals itself as textuality. Loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave the home and whittling down the space one's body takes up-all have symbolic meaning and *political* meaning" (168).

Neurosis and psychic troubles are also depicted in relation to the bodily/reproductive functions of women as mothers and their relationships to their children. Enitan's mother is depicted as the first neurotic character of the novel whose mental instability is the result of her son's death: "she who took a child to church to heal him, she who swallowed pills regularly" (93). The trope of child loss is reworked both as a metaphor for the dysfunction of family structures and the decline of future hope, and as a form of bodily disability related to mothers as they separate from what is usually identified as part of their body and material existence. The mother's geography is violently restricted with the loss of the child hence resulting in neurosis.

In addition, Enitan's body's constant abortions and "regurgitations" of children as well as the other cases of indigestion or violent reactions represent the endangering of not only the maternal but also the female-sexualized body in particular social contexts. Enitan's repressed tension during pregnancy: "I touched the hard mound below my navel and imagined my child curled up. Nervous bubbles popped inside me" (197) is later echoed by

her conclusion about the origins of female psychic disorder: "Too many women, I thought, ended up treating domestic frustrations like mild cases of indigestion, shift-shift, prod-prod, and then, nothing" (186-87) . On the other hand, the counterpart to Enitan's quasi barren and slim body is Sheri's rape and abortion story. Right after the incident of rape, Sheri becomes unable to control her appetite as she eats all the food provided by Enitan as a traumatic response. (65-66) Sheri's body represents the violently sexualized female and although her unwanted and 'compulsory" pregnancy is terminated she becomes barren and is ironically deprived of free choice in relation to motherhood.

Another form of embodied disorder is related to women's active participation and experience of violence in the military or national context. This appears through the case of the character of the mother of prisons in the novel who suffers from insomnia and who resists the judicial system by her uninterrupted speech. Resulting from her traumatic experience of child loss and criminal act, Mother of the prisons' mental disorder liberates her mad talk and challenge of the government (271-6) As a counter- example to that of Sheri or Enitan who concludes that "silence could be used as a shield as Sheri did" (252), these women insist on re-enacting or "vomiting" out the traumatic event through and through. Similarly, Enitan's final mad dance and loss of control of herself in public space can be read as the novel's re-affirmation of madness, or undisciplined social behavior by women as the only site of their agency which is at the same time the site of their estrangement and alienation.

Women's Writing, Activism, and the Strategies of Resistance

In his address to a community of Nigerian writers, "Nationalism and the Creative Talent" Ernest N. Emenyunu puts forward a challenging question: "to whom the Nigerian

writer belongs?" (377). A tentative answer, he suggests, should redirect the focus to the position of modern Nigerian writing vis à vis the question of nationalism as well as the relationship of the writers to their "local" public (378). The problematic of address, audience, and readership in African writing in general and Nigerian literature in particular constitutes part of a historical larger debate about the African literary tradition itself which touches upon the equally challenging questions of language, genre, themes, and publication of African texts. One of the major debated questions in relation to the new generations of writers is that of migration and overseas writing and publishing. This issue is summed up by Sefi Atta in her discussion with co-women authors:

> Nigerian-based writers have seen for themselves that only those of us who are based overseas are getting attention for now. I may not be culpable, but I won't be proud of any literary achievement overseas unless I speak out about the bias. It is amazing to me how the publishing world here encourages African women writers to speak out about the oppression that we face. They can't get enough of those stories and yet they refuse to hear what we have to say about their own racism and sexism. I will always write the stories that I want to write, but I win a prize every time I have a protagonist who is some sort of victim. That is the reality. I have stories of Nigerians in everyday situations that no one wants to publish. (4)

Atta's ironical comment about the thematic selectiveness of publishers problematizes questions of narrative choices and representation far more than in dealing with the exclusion of women's texts from the literary canons. One can equally argue that the abundance of international reception and credit for Nigerian women's texts does not contribute to the forging of Nigerian or African female literary tradition but constitute instead, the basis of co-option and global assimilation of postcolonial writing within mainstream capitalist "fetish" production. A large number of feminist postcolonial fiction participates as Mohanty explains, in the "coherence of effect" created by the hegemonic

discursive tradition of writing about and constructing "third world women" as a homogenous, victimized and objectified category (54). In this particular context the problematic arises from the new challenges that these women writers publishing abroad face in voicing out feminist and gender questions to a multiplicity of audiences and a complex, both national and transnational readership. This is re-enacted through the presence of stereotyping and categorization that their fiction works with as well as works through to resist both co-option and artistic demise.

Writing about politics and the state in relation to gendered identity formations, women's texts turn therefore into ambivalent narrative constructions which represent as Szeman argues, an effect of "the number of discourses with which these writers have to contend and work through…these multiple, heterogeneous and in many cases contradictory discourses and practices together form the zone of instability with which writers had [and have] to operate" (3). The discursive and narrative tensions are frequently managed as well as vehiculed through the persistent dialectic of consciousness, a double position both inside and outside the different discourses and traditions. As Susan Bordo delineates, "the pathologies of female protest function paradoxically as if in collision with the cultural conditions that produce them, reproducing rather than transfiguring precisely that which is being protested" (177). In Atta's novel, this appears through the omniscient self-conscious discourse as well as the ambivalence of Enitan's attitudes in, for instance, questions of gender and politics. As Atta justifies it, the deliberate construction of the female character in protest is intended to counter easy categorization or identification within the multiple discourses of identity:

> If my protagonist is a victim, she must also be capable of victimizing others in some way. She cannot just be the object of abuse, which is what publishers here seem to prefer. For instance, I can't write a story about a Nigerian woman who faces racism in America without showing how tribalistic and how racist she can be. (5)

This ambivalence is shown in different instances of the novel as Enitan constantly shifts from one consciousness or mode of thinking to the other: from misogynist judgment of Sheri's rape "'some girls encourage it' I said. I couldn't remember, but bad girls got raped was all I'd heard before, and of the bad girls I knew, not one had taken her matter to court"(74), to defensive attitudes in favor of women, and finally to : "I promised myself that I would no longer speak for women in my country, because, quite simply, I didn't know them all" (284).

Subsequently, the self conscious narrative ironically problematizes the issue of political representation and commitment through Enitan's satirical comment about the disengagement of her own bourgeois generation:

> We were going out and staying in. Any talk of political protest was the talk of mad English people, or Nigerians who were trying to be like them. We didn't spare a thought for those who were finding it difficult to pay their school fees, now that the oil boom in our country had become a recession. We rebelled and used our pocket money to buy leather jackets, or unusual shoes. That was what we did. (77)

The dramatic rise of bourgeois lifestyles with capital flow after the civil war and during the oil boom era, totalitarianism and dictatorship become more operative and effective in stunning the development of a proper or free national and political consciousness and enhancing repressive political ideologies. Enitan captures this intricate relationship between economic and political inflation:

> The oil boom children politics in our country was a scuffle between the military and politicians. Both were conservative and so were we. Now our greatest contribution to our society was that we were more traditional than the people who had given birth to us. (77)

Ironically, Enitan succeeds only partially in unlearning her cultural and social false consciousness remaining unable to "speak for" and politically or sexually represent the different popular realities and experiences. As a result, and in addition to the self conscious narrative, the writer's limitation of Enitan's representability serve as critical metanarrtive reminders of the limitation of the first personal narrative and the genre of the novel itself in promoting political freedom for the masses or as relevant to all social categories. As Georg Lucaks explains, "the historical novel of anti-fascist humanism" displays social and political faultlines as "writers approach their theme from a high level of abstraction" and use protagonists who "embody emotionally and intellectually" high ideals and principles. In trying to embody a historical period, these novels not only misrepresent the popular, but also display aesthetic faultlines as they seek to "restore connection" with the "historical spirit of the age" and individual consciousness, "yet the restored connection is nevertheless too direct, too intellectual, too general"(286).

In the novel, the issue of political activism through writing is specifically linked to the two figures of activist journalists Peter Mukoro and Grace Ameh. The necessity and role of writing within the context of dictatorship and the struggle for democratization are articulated by Ameh when she explains to Enitan "In this state we're living in, where words are so easily expunged, from our constitution, from publications, public records, the act of writing is activism" (262). Ameh's statement points out the discursive part of the political struggle as a site of resistance to the repressive discursive state apparatuses.

Yet, and as Enitan observes while attending the meeting of the community of activist writers, self and political consciousness is but one step in the struggle:

> I was in awe of the people I was listening to, that they wrote without recognition or remuneration, and more so that they denounced injustices as a group, at the expense of their freedoms and lives. At the same time, I thought that none of them could be fully conscious of the implications of speaking out. They would have awareness only; an awareness that manifested itself in whispers, omitted names... I had lived with the awareness so long, it had become normal. But what made a person cross the frontier of safety? It wasn't consciousness. Anger, I thought. (263-4)

In this passage, Enitan draws the attention to the difference between consciousness and real activism, the direct involvement with danger and the oppressive state machine. Towards the end of the novel, activism involves break and discontinuity tension and violence. Another strategy of resistance therefore resides in the break with the tradition or the trope of mothering and mother lineage. The discontinuity in Enitan's life takes action on the private and public level by breaking the social engagement and institution of both marriage and biological motherhood as in the case of choosing Sheri as the "God" mother of her child.

This gesture constitutes a break with the symbolic feminine tradition and represents therefore another level of ambivalence for the narrative. The continuity between Enitan and her mother is portrayed as a negative or alienating one. Hence her final decision to symbolically cut the chain of negative returns or reincarnation of the *abiku* or ghostly figure at the end of the novel when she consciously chooses a different developmental model for her daughter:

> I had only one wish for her, that she would not be disinherited in her lifetime. I chose Sheri as her grandmother. She would understand. Following Yoruba tradition, Yimika could have been called "Yetunde" "mother has returned" to salute my mother's passing, but I decided against it. Everyone must walk their own path unencumbered. Hers wouldn't be easy, born in a motherland that treated her children like bastards, but it was hers. (319)

This final instance metaphorically constitutes the point of return to "the question of realism and new Nigerian women's writing" to use Bryce's words. As she explains; "realist narrative strategies may be read ambivalently, as simultaneously performing new identities and revisioning old ones" (56). Hence the final dismissal of the mythical/magical element of reincarnation results in liberating the daughter (and symbolically the coming generations) from the earlier traumas and negative models while at the same time facing the difficulties of the political and social narrative of instability of the nation. This turn represents the coming of age of an empowered and "severed" female consciousness and subjectivity which is to be fully experienced and further developed by the future generation of women writers.

In this sense, Atta's novel implicitly displays a movement or shift from the earlier modes and narrative strategies or tropes "imposed" by first and second generation writers such as the mother-daughter continuity trope. As Jane Bryce explains, it constitutes a sign of:

> The new directions that fictional accounts of women's identities are taking in Nigeria. I suggest that the forms of feminine identity evident in earlier women's writing, constrained by nationalist priorities that privileged masculinity, have given way to a challenging reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world. This constitutes a shifting of the ground of identity-construction in Nigerian fiction away from the fully-constituted masculine self, to a notion of selfhood as split or multiple. The use of twins as a narrative device has emerged in these writers as a means of exploring the repressed feminine in relation to a socially conditioned version of femininity, inflected by issues of exile, hybridity and metissage." (52)

For Enitan, the choice of discontinuity is liberating from gendered models of experiencing national challenges and possibilities in the future. Although this politics remain weakly expressed in relation to activism with the persistence of gendered structures, yet it represents a realistic choice. The choice of realism as a representative mode in dealing with national issues represents the ultimate maturity and actualization of the female writer's voice for the future and the severing of the politics of imagination which characterized earlier writings as embryonic and symbolic narratives.

Conclusion

Everything Good Will Come and Broken lives represent different experimentations with the theme of violence and the nation. The novel and the stories re-enact the female and feminist need of investigating the troubled and violent moments of national history in Nigeria. Both Kalu and Atta engage with the notion of the nation as a violent and gendered formation in the particular instances of the civil war and that of the military coups and dictatorship. In addition, both texts show how violence is contingent in different historical moments and how the development of national politics is inhibited by the restrictive violent models of political and social practice as the writers engage with the national ruptures or failures as predicaments of violent national consciousnesses and imaginaries.

Civil wars constitute one of the most violent material manifestations of the failures of particular national visions, and hence, a constant reminder for any nation of its eternal constant "cracks" and vulnerability. From this perspective, the accounts of the Biafra civil war become "anti-national", inherently deconstructive of nationalist narratives. In Nigeria and other postcolonial African countries, anti-colonial and nationalist ideology was forged not only by political activists and discourse, but also as a cultural project by a large number of intellectuals and writers. The political collapse of the nation as a unifying or collective form of identity brings out the collapse of different imaginaries and narratives which mimic or recreate the nation as unified, unitarian and unproblematic.

Hence, the Biafra war and the earliest failures of the postcolonial nation both as "imagination" and actual "possibility" to use Benedict Anderson's and Imre Szeman's terms are reenacted in Kalu's stories as a "broken" narrative form and voice. Moreover, through these stories, the Biafra war only actualizes the potent material (ethnic, linguistic) frictions within the postcolonial nation which are often downplayed or even understood as

"imaginary" within the discourse of nationalism that portrays itself as homogenous and conflict-free.

Militarism and political dictatorship constitute another instance of the failure of the nation as a political possibility. The dominance of the military as structures of governing annihilates the possibilities of democratic political representation for the people. The different instances of these failures of representation are recreated in Atta's novel through the chapter divisions corresponding historically to military coups. Atta's transposition of the different violent outbreaks of militarism and national conflict into the novelistic narrative form constitutes a strategy of re(w)ri(gh)ting the "national genre" and inscribing the moments of fragmentation onto narrative form and consciousness. Therefore like Kalu's aesthetics of the short story, Atta's novel proposes discontinuity as a cognitive and aesthetic model of apprehending the imagination and narrative of violent national formations and as a site where emergent gendered literary and political voices are articulated.

Endnotes

P 8: [1] in her seminal work, Stratton discusses questions of publishing and critical credit as related to gender politics and the first generation of African women writers. This is particularly done in the foirst part of the book through the analysis of the critical reception of Nwapa's *Efuru* by the two dominant critical traditions of the new critical formalism as well as the historicist critics from the 1960s onward. She argues that patriarchal cultural and literary codes operating both in terms of the published writers' order in the *Heinmannn's African Writers Series* as well as the critical response of major critics like Eldred Jones and Eustace Palmer (first reviews of *Efuru* published between 1967-68 respectively in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and *African literature Today*), denied Nwapa and other emergent women writers "proper" literary status as equal to their male compatriots.

P 47: [2] the novel is chronologically divided into four chapters following the key dates in the Nigerian political scene; the first chapter is situated in 1971 referring to the rebirth of the federation after the civil war. The second chapter is dated after the third military coup in 1975 by Mohammed's regime, the third chapter after the sixth military coup by Babangida in 1985 and the crystallization of political power in the military during the eighties and the final chapter is the date of the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and the MOSOP activists. For a survey of Nigerian history key dates see Levi Akalazu Nwachuku and G. N. Uzoigwe. Troubled Journey : Nigeria since the Civil War.

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