REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CITY IN THE EARLY AND RECENT NIGERIAN NOVEL

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Omolola Risikat AKANDE in the Department of English, in the University of Ibadan, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This is for my Prince and Princess, Godwin and Aret,

for all the days, the tears, and the hope.

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ABSTRACT

Many of the studies on the growth of the Nigerian novel have given more attention to characterisation, but little attention has been given to how Nigerian novelists depict the impact of the city on the moulding of the personality of urban dwellers. This study, therefore, examines the transformation of the image of the city as a place of limitless opportunities and uninhibited enjoyment of life in the Nigerian novels of the 1950s and 1960s; to the more recent period – from the end of the 1990s to the present – where it is privileged as a metaphor for cultural rootlessness.

The study employs a postmodernist theory which highlights the pre-eminence of representation over reality. Ten novels written by five Nigerian novelists were purposively selected: Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954), *Jagua Nana* (1961) and *Iska* (1981); Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *A Man of the People* (1966); Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979); Maik Nwosu's *Invisible Chapters* (2001) and *Alpha Song* (2001); and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and *Swallow* (2008). A close reading and content analysis of the texts were carried out.

In the absence of the restraining influence of traditional society, city dwellers are generally culturally adrift, and with the prevalence of corruption and excessive individualism, social disintegration sets in. While the early novels like *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana* portray the city as a place of enjoyment, free from the restraints of traditional society, a space where people's expectations and potentials could be realised, there is a more radical shift in the figuration of the city in the novels written after the 1990s. The metaphors include the city as paradise, a place of opportunity, suffering and frustration. *Invisible Chapters, Alpha Song, Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow* portray how the attempt to enjoy the advantages of the city environment result in problems and wanton corrupt practices, which serve as a means of escape from the hardship and frustrations that characterise life in the city. Novels like *Iska* and *The Joys of Motherhood* also project the image of the modern, contemporary city as a place of vicious ruthlessness. While *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* focus on issues like corruption in public life with some restraint, *Invisible Chapters, Alpha Song, Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow* treat the vices in the city in greater depth and depict desperate city sojourners trying to cope with the challenges of a harsh socio-political environment.

Early and recent Nigerian novelists portray the city differently in terms of communal, socio-political, economic and ideological orientations. Thus, while most characters in the early Nigerian novels are committed to primordial ethnic loyalty, those in the recent ones are engaged in new forms of communalism which globalise their identity.

Key words: Nigerian fiction, Metaphor, Postmodern, Literary representation.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In spite of the diversity of theories of literature, many scholars and critics such as Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto (1961), seem to agree that most of the theories can be put into one of the three broad classifications under which literature can be defined. These classifications include the "Imitative" "Expressive" and the "Affective" theories of literature. The imitative theory posits that art is an imitation of life. Hence, in his *Poetics*, Aristotle holds that "a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious and complete." The expressive theory believes that a work of art does not necessarily imitate but that it expresses the feelings of the artist. The artist's vision, the theory holds, "is more inward than outward; the work of art is not an imitation of the external world but an expression of the internal world, the embodiment of an emotion." This theory calls to mind William Wordsworth's famous declaration that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Barnet et al, 2). The affective theory holds that works of art valuably affect our nervous system.

Over the years, the imitative theory appears to have had an advantage in the attempt to define literature or to explain its nature, function and relevance to humanity. This is especially so in view of Aristotle's warning that the artist "does not imitate servilely," that "he recreates reality and re-presents it to us in a fashion in which we see its essence more clearly" (Barnet et al, 2). He explains that in an artistic imitation, "form is presented in a substance not natural to it;" adding that art is superior to history because, where history must stick to facts; art refines nature. The imitative theory also includes the notion that literature gives us not only pleasure but knowledge and insight into the nature of reality (Barnet et al, 5). In his contribution to the definition of literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o

opines that literature does not develop in a vacuum but is given an impetus by the political, social, cultural and economic forces of a particular society (*Homecoming*, xv). Maik Nwosu, in his *Invisible Chapters* (1999, 154), opines that "literature gives us a fresh perspective, a new way of looking at life, it mobilises our consciousness." This thesis holds that literature deals with humans in their environment or society. It studies humans and their environment, illuminating their needs, problems, achievements and failings.

Many traditional disciplines have studied the city from different perspectives; some of these approaches include size, legal status, and socio–cultural characteristics. But in its complexity, the city remains resistant to scholarly synthesis and a working definition has continued to be determined by the individual discipline involved. But even within a single field, the view of the city is clouded. For example, the preface to an anthology of "New York Poets" includes a disclaimer: "This book… is not a collection of poems about New York, nor is it a collection of poets writing about New York – we don't think that any of them would agree as to what New York ever is" (William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 2)). In spite of the different approaches to the study of the city, however, in Literature, the idea of the modern city is often difficult to separate from the physical change, social turmoil, psychological trauma and intellectual ferment bound up with the idea of modernism in general (William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 4-5). Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley, 1994, view the city as an aggregation or accumulation, not just in demographic, economic or planning terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion of city dwellers.

According to them, "cities are more than their built environment, more than a set of class or economic relationships, they are also an experience to be lived, suffered, undergone." Back home in Nigeria, renowned poet and essayist, Odia Ofeimun (2007) says a city is "built or grows according to the pull of a more or less unitary purpose." He anchors his definition of a city in categorisation into city types. In this regard, Ofeimun identifies within the Nigerian landscape, a variety of city types as including "an oil city, a coal city, a tourist city, the political city, garrison city, a city built to the glory of an occupation or trade" and a 'busy body' city which he contends all cities have a tendency to become. This work concentrates on the city as seen through the eyes of novelists and their characters so as to offer a particular kind of witness to the challenges, opportunities, stresses and frustrations of city life. The researcher believes that a concentration on the insights,

attitudes and values derived from a personal perspective would complement some of the earlier views on the city.

If literature is about people and their environment, it follows therefore that literature and the city are intrinsically linked since people and the environment, the direct focus and concern of literature, are also the two most essential components of the city; as John Reader (2004) observes that cities would not exist without people. Literature and the city are inseparable as one affects the other. Literature enables us to understand ourselves and our environment, in this case, the city. Indeed, the relationship between literature and the city becomes more apparent when we reckon that cities are destined to become the most significant phenomenon on the planet. Even presently, the nature of cities affects the entire humanity which literature seeks to present and explain. Blanchant (1999), studies literature in relation to the city and finds three distinctive areas of inter–relatedness. According to him, cities are "unique and unparaphrasable" (2) because no matter how many common physical, historical, economic, socio-political or cultural features a particular city may have in common with another city or other cities, it cannot be substituted for any of such other cities. He observes that the impossibility to exchange nature of cities derives from the rather unique and particular way they shape the lives of those who live in them and this he describes as the citiness of cities. He asserts that like Literature, which possesses inherent autonomy and otherness, the city, in spite of having economic, political, social and cultural histories which can be identified and in relation to which they can be described, interpreted, explained and judged, often display a resistance to such simple interpretation.

He posits further that literature can be said to exist separately from its author. The author is in a sense irrelevant to a work of literature because he disappears from his work and only the work, the literature, is left. In the same way, Blanchant observes that the city annihilates authorship. Explaining his theoretical position, he asserts that although both literature and the city are conscious creations, however prominent their authorship may be, it quickly disappears into obscurity. He also believes that the multiplicity of agency at work in the city means that it is not made by any one which he maintains could also be interpreted to mean that it was made by everyone. He maintains that urban life is constantly made and remade by multiple realities and that the city erases authorship for itself just like the book which he contends enters the world and carries out its work of

transformation and negation. The city, like the book, is a source of new realities. The third level of inter-relationship between literature and the city, in Blanchant's view, is that like the work of literature, the city brings its authors/writers into existence, not the other way around. According to him, "the writer only finds himself, only realises himself, through his work: before his work exists, not only does he not know who he is, but he is nothing (36). Like literature which writes its author into existence, he contends, the city writes its inhabitants into city people, "into people constituted by and living in the constantly moving stream of money" (36).

Beyond the general identifiable levels of linkage between literature and the city the world over, the fact that a close (though problematic) relationship has always existed between the Nigerian literature, especially the Nigerian novel, and the city is almost indisputable. The earliest large body of indigenous literature was in the genre of "Onitsha Market literature," which emerged in 1947 consisting mostly of fiction in which love and political themes predominated. Although generally viewed as being relatively inartistic because of the absence of depth and the fact that most of the authors were semi-literate, the simplicity of language and its brevity however made the literature a compelling read for the reading public of the time as a result of which over 200 works were produced between 1947 and 1966 (Ogunbiyi, 6) One significant element of the "Onitsha Market Literature" is that it is essentially a city literature. The rise of urban centres in Nigeria and the mass movement of youth from the rural areas to the cities provided the basis for this early form of prose which often portrayed city life and sometimes appeared to be meant to guide new arrivals from the rural areas to the cities on the ways of their "new world." Titles such as *How to Talk to a Girl and Win Her Love* and *Beware of Harlots and Bad Friends* reveal the didactic nature of these works of art. The unique status of Onitsha as the home of the first Nigerian English Language popular literature was as a result of its rise to city status; it was at the time the most prominent commercial town in the old Eastern Region of Nigeria. The city is therefore the symbol of the triumph of the first generation of Nigerian English Language Popular Literature.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The city has always been an important literary symbol because writers have powerful feelings about their environment which they use as setting for their works. The writers' feelings have been generalised. While some writers have developed powerful hostile attitudes to the village as a place of backwardness, ignorance and limitation and to the city as a centre of learning, communication and light; the feelings of a majority of writers have yielded to the idea of the village as a natural way of life, of innocence and simple virtue, but of the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition. More than half of the world's population currently resides in the city (Reader, 2004) with increasing number of writers considering the city as the ideal setting for their works. Yet, most of them have continued to hold a negative view of the city resulting in a persistent negative depiction of the city and city life thereby suggesting that the city has an image problem in literature. The city's image problem in literature needs to be thoroughly investigated.

A close look at Jean Baudrillard's idea of *Simulacrum* - a separation of signifier from the signified, confirms the critical role of image in the determination of the status of the city in literature. He defines the signifier-signified relationship as a relationship of a symbol to a notion of reality. He explains that signifiers are representations, be they pictures, symbols, words or anything at all that points to something else outside of themselves, something which supposedly has a reality of its own regardless of how it is represented. With *Simulacrum* however, there is no signified, only the signifier. In other words, there is only a representation without an original thing that it copies, no level of existence to which a signifier refers. With *Simulacrum*, reality collapses into image and there is no distinction between image and reality. Everything exists as all image, all surface, all signifier **(**Klages, 2006, 169-171**).** Therefore, if we are persuaded by the Postmodernist idea of the eradication of the distinction that previously existed between representation and reality and we concede that the city does have an image problem resulting in its precarious and uneasy relationship with literature, then, the city's image problem should be investigated thoroughly. Literature influences the way people conduct themselves in the city while the behaviour of people in the city also influences what comes out as literature.

A critical examination of the problematic relationship between literature and the city through a careful study of selected Nigerian novels which use the city as setting is particularly imperative because writers of fiction provide the most intimate knowledge of

urban life since the city is rooted in the habits and customs of the people who inhabit it. Since the time of Dickens and Baudelaire, the city has been seen as a social and psychological landscape and has become one of the most important characters of all, determining and imaging every human action. In spite of its popularity however, the city continues to lose whatever clear definition it might have had in earlier literature. The American culture for example has never developed a positive image of the city. "Leslie Fiedler and Leo Marx have made a strong case for anti- urbanism as a pre-eminent motif in American literature and other critics have noted also that even where one would expect certain urban sympathies, in Hawthorne and James for instance, the American city has always been scorned" (Sharpe and Wallock, 7).

The gradual devaluation of the city ostensibly for loss of connection and lack of reference to the values of the past is no less noticeable in other countries especially after the industrial revolution. Hence the city has consistently acquired a negative image. Sharpe and Wallock observes that for all the artistic stimulation they provided for instance, the cities of Wordsworth, Dickens, Baudelaire, Melville, Dostoevsky, Tennyson, Eliot and Fitzgerald have predominantly negative connotations. This is probably because, "as Leo Marx argues in *The Machine in the Garden*, the nineteenth-century incursion into the countryside was for the first time in history an irreparable, *technological* one." (Sharpe and Wallock (7-8). If the failures of the city are allowed to become a synonym for those of society therefore, not only literary criticism but humanity in its entirety will inevitably take on an anti-urban colouring. Ironically, it is the city-dwelling writers who perpetuate the negative representation of the city; hence the need to investigate the concerns of these writers which may have been informed by their individual experiences in the city. M. Jerry Weiss (1981) observes that writers who select the city as a setting often combine the elements of sensitivity, pathos and violence to develop a "realistic" story (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 239). Similarly, Marge Piercy (1981), notes that people want stories that help them make sense out of their lives; that when they read a story, they want to know what happens when somebody makes one choice rather than another. In other words, that art validates experience and writers' literary renditions of the city and city life are shaped and influenced by their personal experiences (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 209).

The investigation of the uneasy relationship between the Nigerian Novel and the city resulting in a consistent negative portrayal of the city in novels set in the city is perhaps best approached from a historical perspective especially from the advent of colonialism

which ushered in a new lifestyle that was completely alien to Nigerians. Ofor (1991) records that following the establishment of marine towns for trade purposes as well as administrative towns by the colonial government, the need also arose for the creation of alien institutions such as hotels, schools, hospitals, government offices, films and sundry other hitherto unknown institutions all of which gradually but steadily loosened the co-operative ties that previously bound the individual to his clan (Ofor, in Ikonne *et al*, 23). Other consequences of colonialism on Nigerians, according to him, include a drift towards wage employment and deification of money all of which Nigerian novelists of the urban landscape attempt to recreate in their works since "every writer is a historian of his time" (Eustace Palmer, 1979, cited in Ikonne *et al*, 24). This succinctly captures the crisis of urbanisation occasioned by the colonialism-induced sudden movement of Nigerians from the rural area to the city:

> The rural innocent... who is ignorant of the qualities needed to survive in the hot-house that is the city and who is quite often inadequately equipped as far as education is concerned, to qualify for the more lucrative jobs the city offers is sucked into the miasma of urban corruption and forgoes his avowed goals. Shady substitutes like crime, stealing, alcoholism, excessive materialism and prostitution are then sought (Eustice Palmer, 1979, cited in Ikonne *et al*, 24).

Filth, crime and corruption have become subjects of Nigerian city novelists and their exasperation is understood against the backdrop of many problems that confront the city. Insecurity of lives and property, perennial lockjaw of traffic, epileptic electricity, overcrowding, lack of water supply, rampage of social miscreants, and the culture of extortion by policemen at legal and illegal checkpoints are real and sordid in the city.

However, genuine as the concerns of Nigerian writers have been on the nightmare the emergence and growth of Nigerian cities have tended to constitute to most Nigerians, the significance of the setting of a work of art, especially the implication on the reading public in view of the fact that literature works through influencing emotions, has been given scant attention by critics and scholars and should be investigated. 'City bashing' in Nigerian novels ought to be thoroughly investigated since people will continue to throng the city in search of whatever opportunities they believe are existing in the city but lacking in the countryside and Nigerian novelists, most of whom are city dwellers, will also continue to depict the city and city life in their works thereby solidly affecting people's perception of the city. The way people conduct themselves in the city which ultimately defines the city,

will continue to be shaped and influenced by literary renderings of city life because people act from perception rather than reality**.** How what is on the ground is perceived matters.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In exploring the intricate and often problematic relationship between literature and the city, the postmodern intervention in theory making about the city is relevant. Many scholars view postmodernism as a complex term and they often advise that the study of postmodernism be approached by thinking first of modernism because it is seen either as a continuation of, or a break with dominant features in modernism having emerged from it. Mary Klages (2006) describes modernism as "the movement in visual arts, music, literature and drama which rejects the old Victorian standards of how art should be made, consumed, and what it should mean" (164). Klages further observes that while postmodernism agrees with and follows most of the ideas of modernism like rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, rejecting rigid genre distinctions and favouring fragmentation and discontinuity especially in narrative structures, it sharply differs from modernism in its attitude towards a lot of the trends highlighted above. According to Klages, whereas modernism views fragmentation as something tragic which should be lamented and even mourned, postmodernism celebrates fragmentation and incoherence.

Postmodernism has many influential arguments; but two of these arguments advanced by two French philosophers, Jean Francois Lyotard (The End of the Grand Narratives) and Jean Baudrillard (The Loss of the Real), are particularly relevant to this work. Baudrillard's influential book, *Simulacra* (1981), which Klages reports was first translated into the English language in 1983 as *Simulations,* contends that 'reality' is no longer possible in the world of images and simulations which he observes have come to characterise the contemporary age of mass consumption and technologies. The book, concerned with the depthless world of the 'simulacra,' asserts that there is no longer a real external world; that reality is gone for good and what we have left is only appearance. He posits further that there has been an "implosion of image and reality" and that the real is now defined in terms of image. Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) argues that "supernarratives which purport to explain and reassure are really illusions, fostered in order to smother difference, opposition and plurality" (Klages, 174). He defines

postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives." He observes that all aspects of modern societies (modernism) depend on grandnarratives but that grandnarratives of progress and human perfectability are no longer tenable. Grandnarratives, he further contends, "serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organisation or practice." (Klages, 174). Lyotard explains further that:

> […]every attempt to create 'order' always demand the creation of an equal amount of disorder but a 'grand narrative' masks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that 'disorder' really is chaotic and bad, and that 'order' really is rational and good. Post-Modernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors 'mini narratives; stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large scale universal or global concepts. Post-Modernism 'mini narratives' are always situational, provisional, contingent and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason or stability (Klages, 169).

Lyotard maintains that the 'grandnarratives' of human progress and liberation have lost credibility and that there is no way we can form one unified coherent idea of how the world or human beings operate. Lyotard's postmodernist idea takes away the assumption that there is a particular form or way to view the world because, according to Lyotard, neither the world nor the self any longer possesses unity, coherence or meaning. "They are radically decentred" and the best we can hope for is a series of 'mininarratives' which are "provisional, contingent, temporary and relative and which provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances" (169). Lyotard insists on 'micronarratives' which he admits are different and largely incompatible but which he assures help us to understand 'small situations' and local events.

According to postmodernist submissions, whatever one sees in the city is worthy of celebration. Postmodernist ideas are in support of the multiplicity and pluralism of the base of authority in the city. The postmodern notion of the city therefore will appear to be that the city is good, that the slums are good and that a city like Lagos works! This may appear to be a simplistic way of viewing the relationship between literature and the city; but it is made possible by the equally simplistic attitude of some postmodern theorists like Baudrillard and Lyotard. Klages sums up the postmodern attitude thus: "The world is bad? Let's not pretend that art can make meaning; then, let's just play with nonsense" (166).

Marxism is also relevant to this study. Klages defines Marxism as "a set of theories, or a system of thought and analysis, developed by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century in response to the Western Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism as the

predominant economic mode" (126). Marxism has a direct link with the city in literature because, like feminist theory, Marxist theory is directed at social change which is achievable by understanding social relations. The Marxist perspective looks at the antagonism, so to say, between those who live in a particular way and those others who literally feed off them. We may use the commercial bus drivers in Lagos most of who live in poverty but who have leaders that exploit them while giving the impression of protecting them as an example. The leaders collect the drivers' money and live fat off it thereby creating and maintaining a class hierarchy different from the general representation. What the Marxist does is to question the picture of representation that the postmodernist may be interested in. Whereas the postmodernist will look at how the average commercial bus driver enjoys himself at work, the Marxist looks at the conflictual relationships between them and various classes in a given environment. To the Marxist therefore, that some people live in Government Reservation Area (GRA) while others live in slums can explain a lot of things about how the city is built and how it fares.

The Marxist is interested in the internal structure of the environment including the city and in why and how the repression of people in the lower class affects the management of the city. Ideas within the Marxist mainstream are a weapon of struggle promoted by affirming that ideas, after a given form of acceptance by a populace, actually constitute themselves into substructures and that if ideas are that powerful, then, they ought to be made use of. Marxists make use of ideas in various ways. For some, literature simply becomes mere propaganda for whatever people believe in. The average postmodernist is interested in aesthetics and in representing different facets of a problem so that we see the position of the worker as well as that of the capitalist and all of them are equally legitimate. Marxist theory, on the other hand, believes all positions cannot be legitimate because there is a struggle between ways of accumulating resources and ways of celebrating what we have. Marxists want to analyse social relations in order to change them to a more egalitarian order thereby ultimately changing or at least 'realistically' reflecting the image of the city in literature. Marxists are interested in changing what they perceive as gross injustices and the inequalities existing among residents of the city which they believe have been created by capitalist economic relations.

One of the crucial concepts in Marxist thought is the idea of alienation which observers of city life have also identified as one of the problems of living in the city. Klages explains that there are two aspects to the Marxist idea of alienation. According to her, the first is

that labour is alienated in the sense that the labour put into an object becomes part of the capitalist's profit and it therefore no longer belongs to the labourer. This means that the labourer is alienated from his labour power. The second aspect is that capitalism forces the worker to become alienated even from self by selling his labour power which becomes a mere commodity in the market place. The worker who is forced to exist as a commodity in the labour market is therefore no longer fully human since he cannot exercise free will to determine his actions. He has become alienated from his humanness. Like the pathetic proletariat in the Marxist theory, the average inhabitant of the city hides under the city anonymity and surrenders to dubious means of livelihood which he perennially hides from his folks and which continues to nag at his conscience, thereby alienating himself from his family kinship and self. Marxist theory holds that the economic base in any society generates other social formations which it calls the superstructure. It defines the superstructure as consisting of all other kinds of social activities or systems including politics, religion, philosophy, morality, art and science. It identifies literature as part of any society's superstructure because of the way it articulates forms of cultural ideology; for example, novels or poems might justify or attack a belief or sets of beliefs such as religious beliefs, political beliefs or aesthetic ideas.

Marxist theorists ask questions about how literature functions as part of the superstructure. They want to examine how the economic base of any culture and particularly of capitalist cultures, influences or determines the form and content of literature. They are interested also in how literature functions in relation to other aspects of the superstructure. They want to know for example, if literature reflects the economic base and if so, how? They ask if literature reflects other ideologies and how. Most importantly, Marxist theorists, like feminist theorists, are concerned with investigating how literature can work as a force for social change or as a re-affirmation of existing conditions. In other words, is literature part of the struggle that will end capitalism and bring back socialism, or is literature part of the justification of capitalism?

According to Frederick Engels who posits that ideology functions as an illusion which masks the real situation, literature is also a kind of illusion; a kind of ideology that prevents people from seeing the real relations of production at work. Klages recalls that the earliest Marxist critics argued that a work of literature was entirely determined by the mode of production; that is, by the economic base of the society that produced it. Hence, literature could only uphold the dominant cultural organisation that produced it rather than being a

force for opposition or change. However, she explains that subsequent Marxist critics have argued that literature does something more complicated than simply reflecting the values that support capitalism. She cites the example of Pierre Macherey (1978) whom she credits with the submission that literature does not reflect either the economic base or other ideology, but rather it works on existing ideologies and transforms them, giving those ideologies new shape and structure. In Macherey's views, therefore, literature is distinct from and distant from other forms of ideologies and can provide insights into how ideologies are structured and what their limits are.

Similarly, Klages records Georg Lukacs' (1972) argument that Marxist literary critics should look at a work of literature in terms of the ideological structure(s) of which it is a part, but which it transforms. Another Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser (1971), believes that ideology does not represent the real world but human beings' relation to that real world; in other words, to their perceptions of the real conditions of existence. He holds that it is probably not possible for us to know the real world directly and that what we know are always representations of that world, or representations of our relations to that world. Ideology in Althusser's view is the imaginary version, the represented version, the stories we tell ourselves about our relation to the real world. The real world then becomes something that is the product of our relations to it. This way, the stories we tell ourselves about what is real becomes what is real. Althusser's view again calls to mind the postmodernists' submission on the collapse of the distinction between image and reality. However, Marxist theory is sharply divergent from postmodernist theory in the way in which 'reality' remains the crucial factor in Marxist criticism about the relative importance of literary form and ideological context in literary works.

Whether or not the relationship between literature and the city calls for celebration as some postmodern theorists would like the world to believe; it has been established by writers, researchers and scholars that the city is an important phenomenon in literature. Taking the city as a composite whole, it becomes a character in itself because it makes people act in particular ways. The city corrupts the individual; it spoils relationships; creates divisions among siblings; brings people down; has laws. These are some of the characteristics of the city. Character is a matter of persistence of motives. They are elements that are not just random. The city has generally been presented as a personage and if the character of the city begins to change, the character of the individual who lives in it will begin to change.

What then is the behaviour of the city? What are its characteristics? Many urban writers believe that the city changes its residents; some believe that it is the urban dwellers that change their environment; yet, others hold that it is not everybody who goes to the city that the city changes or who changes the city. What is clear, however, is that the binding together of people in the city is no longer the way it used to be in the village and the way city changes people or people change the city can be taken as a composite whole to assume a character of its own. It brings people together from diverse backgrounds and makes them behave in common ways which is a way of distancing them from the way they came from the village because in the city, the owner of the land is the law. How liveable is the city? What makes a city liveable? Who survives better in the city? Which kinds of characters survive or make the city liveable? Are all cities equally bad? Or, are some cities worse than the others? Different generations of writers treat the city differently.

The old writers' view of the city is different from the young writers' perception of it probably because the old writers were the people who watched their fathers fight for independence; they were the ones who came together at the University of Ibadan. Most of the young writers were born after independence. Ekwensi's conception of the city is essentially broader than that of Achebe. Ekwensi unravels city life in its total ramifications; showing how the city has been invaded by a wide range of foreign values which only destroy the socio-cultural norms and values inculcated in people, especially the youth in traditional society. Achebe shows how the attitude of people in the city makes it fail. The parochial ethic of ethnic groups in the city contributes to why it fails. Maik Nwosu demonstrates that the city does not only worsen empathy, it also creates a disposition of empathy which may not be formal but which makes people believe they can rely on one another.

Buchi Emecheta treats the city as the emancipator; that which takes away a particular social attitude towards women and liberates them from a particular stereotype that the Nigerian male novelist has found consistently convenient to employ. She shows how the condition of living in the city, with its stress and strains, rescues the women from being mere appendages of the male sex and how the role of women in the city goes beyond being wives and sexual partners, contrary to male imagination which finds expression in village novels. Although Emecheta's characters are illiterates, they nonetheless demonstrate a strong desire for 'independence' and her heroine in *The Joys of Motherhood*, encourages a companionate marriage by showing that a woman can command economic resources of her

own. Sefi Atta, a younger writer, takes up the gauntlet by addressing the Nigerian women's lack of characterisation in public service, the professions and other important sectors of the economy. Hence, Atta's heroines display courage, fearlessness, initiative, are capable of meeting their difficulties philosophically; and have zest for life. They are not like the insipid creatures that moon submissively in the world of Achebe and others.

What makes the city wayward? What makes anything wayward is about character theory and that is why a city like Lagos can be described as wayward because it possesses particular character traits which are distinct and clearly identifiable. What is responsible for the crisis of urbanisation? The crisis of urbanisation arises due to the unavailability or inadequacy of the means of solving problems created by a mass movement of people from the rural area to the urban centre. People of diverse backgrounds come together in the city creating a problem of corrupting influence on one another, although they also impact positively on one another. The social infrastructures in the city such as energy, water supply, housing, transportation, waste disposal system and other social amenities are grossly inadequate. Employment opportunities and other avenues for generating wealth which most of them desperately seek are not easily available. Consequently, city dwellers engage in unhealthy competition and rat race that leads to nowhere. All of these problems and more constitute the crisis of urbanisation because the means of solving the problems are not there or because they are inchoate and not effective.

A renowned observer of city life, Italo Calvino (cited in Ihab Hassan in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 91) submits that cities are like dreams and that they are made of desire and fears. This observation provides a succinct summary of the two basic assumptions about the city – that the city is hellish; and that the city gives freedom. While some writers and critics see the city as a place of refuge, others see it as unlikable and even intolerable. Both positions are a result of living experiences. As if taking a cue from these assumptions, existing fiction (literature) over the years, has attempted to evolve a pattern that adequately articulates the two varying concerns or attributes of the city. In line with Marge Piercy's observation about readers' preference for stories they can easily identify and connect with because such stories help readers resolve personal dilemma, writers often express their ideas and create situations in these two conflicting ways in their works; perhaps as the sights and sounds of their personal experiences influence and shape their thoughts. The city has thus become a most provocative environment as rightly observed by M. Jerry Weiss in his essay, "Literature for Youth: The City as Heaven and / or Hell" (1981). Weiss cites the

example of Charles Dickens who, he notes, creates situations and characters shaped by the London environment that could "cause readers of other times to laugh, hold their breath in anticipation, acquire a sense of the terrible to be found in the city, and find the many good things and people who inhabit the city" (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 239).

Similarly in his essay, "Cities of Mind, Urban Words; The Dematerialization of Metropolis in Contemporary American Fiction," Ihab Hassan (1981) acknowledges that there has always existed a struggle, a war, so to say, between two cities. One of them he describes as the city of "human fulfilment" and the other of "inhuman deprivation". Submitting that ambiguity constitutes the central archetype of the city, he explains that the dual image of the city provides humanity with a willing tool with which to recover the ancient debate between nature and civilisation. He recalls that the city has always been seen as a "crime against nature" and that it remains the "crime" that consciousness itself perpetrates, against creation (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts,107). The tendency for the novel to often portray an innocent young man from the country coming to experience urban sins and pleasures, Hassan further contends, is directly traceable to the nature of the city which he believes compels writers into certain idealisation of its orders or disorders.

However, not all writers, or scholars balance the negative and the positive attributes of the city in the way Hassan seems to do. To the majority of the scholars who have been concerned about the city, and more importantly, to writers of fiction, the city is either heavenly or hellish with no possibility of convergence. In Williams Burroughs novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959), for example, "the city is a machine for dying. Spurred on by sex, junk and money, Burrough's city finds its centre in the human body which it uses to control, negate and finally exterminate." Also in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), (both cited by Hassan in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 103-104), the author's depiction of the madhouse is both a metaphor and a microcosm of "the modern city which ruthlessly exploits the poor, the powerless, and the deviant." Drawing extensively from a novel written by one Jeronimo Ruiz, Pedro Juan Soto also illustrates the author's aversion to the city through the vituperations of one of the characters:

> I assure you that I'll do anything to avoid returning ever again to this city. Here is where you find the exhausting struggle for existence. On the surface you find many skyscrapers, many cars, many charitable and religious institutions, lots of noise and movement but beneath the surface, there is only vulgarity, hypocrisy, fraud, competition, boredom, misery, pain. ("The City and I," in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 187).

Clearly therefore, a good number of writers have written and depicted situations in their writings describing the psychological kinship between the individual and the city and have consistently blamed the city for its unwholesome influence on the individual. In his 1961 classic, *The City in History***,** Lewis Mumford examines the origins, transformations and prospects of the city and concludes that the city facilitates the unfortunate and unhelpful decisions that its inhabitants make (Reader, 2004, 304). Pedro Juan Soto also challenges what he describes as the sociological superstition of the "melting pot" accusing it of trying to impose itself on the city immigrant by expecting him to deny his own culture. According to him, the assumption that once an immigrant arrives in the city, he would adopt and defend the urban culture as Odia Ofeimun (2007), seems to suggest, is unrealistic since the city never manages to define its own culture. He asserts that "it's not possible to cut away the roots of any human being" (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 90), stopping short of calling the city an impostor.

Holding the second position are those who celebrate the city as an end in itself. These people conceive of the city as an archetype of dynamism; a place that may awaken a feeling of awe but not of violence. Unable to understand the growing anti-urban culture in America, Leo Marx (1981) offers his fellow Americans what he perceives as compelling reasons why American writers should convey an affirmative attitude toward city life. He contends that Americans have been a city building, city dwelling people right from the beginning; recalling that even the European occupation of North America was a process of relentless urbanisation. He admonishes them to reflect a preference for an urban way of life reminding them that when the republic was founded, roughly nine out of ten Americans lived in a rural environment "but by now, that fraction is less than three out of ten." He gives more reasons while he loves the city;

> Cities are the places where scholars, artists and writers naturally congregate. They do so because… most of the vital institutions of mental production universities, libraries, theatres, museums, galleries, publishers, printers, have been located in cities. Cities are the places where ideas travel most quickly, where one can most readily become knowing [...] (Marx, in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 65).

Similarly, John Reader in his book, *Cities*, (2004), takes a strong exception to the negative depiction of the city affirming that the city is "a dynamic entity with recognizable cycles of birth, growth and death but certainly something that was nurtured by generations of people whose own life cycles kept the city functioning" (8). He criticises the popular anti-urban

position which tends to label the city as unnatural arguing that decay, a frequently mentioned attribute of the city and for which it is deplored, is a natural process as well. He maintains that "every bit of the city was originally a part of the earth, no less formed by a geophysical or biological process" (8). While conceding that the city is different from the village because it is assembled by the conscious direction and effort of people, he posits that such a conscious assemblage should not render the city an unnatural habitat in so far as the effort is directed to the good of the whole – "advancing civilization."

It is Reader's strong conviction that "the role of the city in human affairs runs deep well beyond the streets and buildings and into the realms of conscious and subconscious awareness that make us who we are" (9). Joyce Carol Oates in "Imaginary Cities America" (1981) further affirms the positivity of the city by describing it as the "fountain of emotion" where an individual can experience a "cacophonous" variety of sensation. She believes in the validity of William James' remarks as far back as 1907 regarding the city of New York in which the city was painted in magnificent and extravagant terms. Oates perceives the city as a place of godliness because, according to her, it does retain its aura of the sacred. Again, individuality and anonymity, two of the city's most hateful attributes because they negate the communal way of living that exists in the countryside, constitute, for Oates, some of the greatest and most fascinating assets of the city.

> The city's gifts of anonymity, the promise of wages for work - wages agreed upon in advance – make the individual possible for the first time in history **(Oates** in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 18).

Above all, Oates is of the opinion that the condemnation, to which the literary minds have subjected the city over the years, is an indication of their fascination for it. In her view, the intensity with which the city has engaged their attention is a demonstration of their realisation that the city is indeed "a phenomenon - an outrage, a spectacle, an emblem of ingenuity that seems frankly superhuman" (18). Elsewhere in the world, living in the city is considered to be important if one wants to feel at the heart of things and diversity is believed to be at the heart of the city as things happen in the cities; markets, shops and the streets themselves are all places of social life where interactions may help to foster identities. The streets of the city also provide pleasure. Hence, 'city air makes you free' is a popular saying in Germany.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the didactic value of the Nigerian city novel from the "Onitsha Market Literature" tradition consequent upon Onitsha's rise to the commercial leadership of the old Eastern Nigeria and its significance as a symbol of the triumph of the first generation of Nigerian English Language popular literature. Beyond the didactic value of the Nigerian city novel, the thesis also seeks to discover other motives and thematic concerns of the Nigerian city novels. It examines the seeming symbolisation of the Nigerian city as representative of the decadent modern Nigeria where the citizen's life is characterised by fruitless struggle, suffering and insecurity. The study examines the real impact of urban life on the Nigerian city dwellers and critically appraises what seems to be the conclusion of many writers of the city novel that philandering and extravagance reign supreme in the typical Nigerian city and that city people, most of whom are depicted as living in degradation and squalor, are largely vain preferring to pre-occupy themselves with sex, material possessions and conspicuous consumption. Using a wide collection of fiction that featured in the tradition, the study seeks to discover the general and peculiar traits of Lagos as a Nigerian city and the impact of "Lagos life" on people as portrayed by the literary works of the period.

This study is intended to enhance the understanding of the implications of living in the city especially life in Lagos and its negative influences on cultural nationalism. It is the aim of the thesis that the conclusions it shall reach as well as the totality of the body of its work shall be thorough, objective, comprehensive, balanced and acceptable to all that may come across it and benefit from it. It is also envisaged that the work will establish the imperative for a better and more liveable city for the whole of humanity in general and for Nigerians in particular. It will underscore the important role of image in the determination and conditioning of city dwellers' attitude in the city since image not only shapes and influences behaviour of residents in the city but also determines the choices they make in the city. It is expected that the work will be a reference material for students of literature seeking knowledge on the evolution of the Nigerian novel in general and of the Nigerian city novel in particular.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The research method for this work emphasises interpretation of the selected texts. The city is studied around the texts and the research focuses on the explicit and implicit submissions of the authors through events in the novels in general and the lives of the characters in particular. The thesis is descriptive within the ambit of certain theorists of the city such as Lewis Munford (1961) who holds that the city facilitates the "unhelpful decisions of its inhabitants" (Reader, 2004:304) and Joyce Carol Oates (1981) who posits that "the city is [...] the only possible place for the liberation of a certain kind of independent and courageous woman" (Jaye and Watts, 1981:17). Chapter One provides a background to the research and establishes the theoretical framework of the study. The second chapter is on literature review with in-depth study of existing theories of the city. Chapter Three focuses on the old writers' view and treatment of the city as represented by selected works of Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe. This chapter critically examines old writers' portrayal of the city as a place of enjoyment but where moral irresponsibility is also at its peak and looks at how the conflict between the old and new values of individualistic tendencies in the city makes or mars the writers' city dweller subjects. The Fourth chapter is on new writers' conception of the city, represented by Maik Nwosu, a contemporary city writer whose works are concerned with the city's moulding and re-moulding of its inhabitants with a decisive generational gap. This chapter attempts to discover what distinguishes the city dwellers of old from the current ones. It also provides a veritable ground for comparing and contrasting previously held positions about city life with current views. The issue of gender balance is addressed in chapter five by focusing on female writers. This chapter looks at the contributions of the Nigerian female writers to the study of the city and city life and attempts to discover the extent to which city life influences female writers in ways that are different from those of male writers. The concluding chapter provides a kind of appraisal of the study. It also reveals some of the convictions of the researcher arising from a careful consideration of the submissions of selected writers, through their works.

The scope of the thesis involves paying particular attention to the works of Cyprian Ekwensi who is arguably the only Nigerian writer of note who grew from the "Onitsha Market Literature" tradition while also dwelling extensively on the ideas put forward by subsequent writings set in Lagos with a view to discovering the significance of the setting. Ekwensi began his writing career as a pamphleteer and it was some of his short stories he

put together to realise the manuscript of his first full length novel, *People of the City* which established him as the first West African author of a major novel in English in addition to marking a vital milestone in the evolution of African literary writing. Thus, *People of the City* (1954) enjoys the distinction of being the first major prose fiction published by a Nigerian and its selection as the first text to be considered in this study is mandatory. Apart from being the first Nigerian full length city novel, *People of the City* also merits its selection by offering a vibrant portrait of life in an emerging West African city. It depicts the extreme permissiveness and impersonal relationships that moderate the lives of people who migrate to the city. Variously described as a popular and influential member of the first wave of Nigerian writers, a pioneer writer, Nigeria's most populist writer, the fore-runner of Nigeria and African literature, the doyen of Nigerian literature, pioneering literary spirit, the foremost novelist of the city space, the lead writer of popular fiction and the forefather of the city novel among many more appellations, Ekwensi's many other works are also worthy of consideration because they introduce a critical view of urban existence and explore the lure, frills and challenges of social life in Lagos. Also to be studied is *Jagua Nana* (1961), perhaps, Ekwensi's most widely acclaimed city novel which chronicles the adventure of a socially ambitious but ageing prostitute in Lagos. Ekwensi's heroine in this novel is undoubtedly one of the most memorable characters in Nigerian literature. Another of Ekwensi's novels slated for consideration is *Iska* (1966) which tells the story of another city girl that falls into the frantic pace of life in modern Lagos, miss-spends her youth and ultimately pays the supreme price for her misdemeanour.

If Ekwensi is selected for being the pioneering spirit of city literature, Chinua Achebe, the man credited above all others with the invention of the Modern African Novel cannot but be studied in a major work such as this. Achebe, who is described by Nadine Gordimer as the father of Modern African Literature, spawned a whole generation of African writers who have emulated his ingenuity and vision. Two of his works which are distinctively city novels, *No Longer At Ease* (1960) and *A Man of the People* (1966) are included for consideration. Apart from Achebe's position and stature in Nigerian literature, his inclusion among the authors to be studied is anchored in two hardly controvertible premises. Although Achebe and Ekwensi belong to the same generation of writers and that it may suffice to study only either of them, it is worth mentioning however that while Achebe's works are far more complex and more sophisticated because he is a lot more skilled, Ekwensi has a grasp of the city that is absent in Achebe. Also, Achebe's world

view is completely different from that of Ekwensi. While Achebe's city and what happens there are a brain child of colonialism and the pollution in the city a result of the invasion and destruction of African values by foreign ones, Ekwensi almost strictly examines the place of morality in the modern city. It is important, therefore, that these different approaches to looking at the city be studied with a view to finding areas of convergence and divergence as well as the significance and implications of both.

Of great significance to the study of the city in literature is an examination of the changes in the way writers perceive and portray the city earlier and now. In other words, are there significant differences between the city of the 1950s and the 1960s (before and immediately after independence) and the city of the 1990s to the present? Are the views and opinions of recent writers different from those of the earlier writers? How has the city fared over the years? Has the much acclaimed generational gap in Nigerian literature as captured in such appellations as first generation and contemporary writers translated to equally different ways of perceiving the city? These and other posers and the need to find answers to them inform the choice of a writer like Maik Nwosu whose two urban novels. *Alpha Song* and *Invisible Chapters* were published in 2001. Although, unfairly labelled as belonging to the "fleshly school of writing" (Nnolim, 2005, *The Guardian*, 29), Nwosu's voice on the city is significant to this work especially because of his youthful understanding of what it means to live in Lagos. Also, crucial to an authentic study of the city is the consideration of the female voice. How do Nigerian female writers view the city and city life? Are the city experiences of the female necessarily different from those of the male? Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) captures the perception of the older generation of Nigerian female writers of the urban landscape while Sefi Atta's recent novels *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and *Swallow* (2008) have been carefully selected to represent the new female voices in Nigerian prose fiction.

The study could have given consideration to other African writers but it does not essentially because the community of themes and the variations that other African novelists deal with are not dissimilar to those chosen for this study. Moreover, the thesis is seeking for a composite image of the city which the researcher believes can be more readily achieved by using novelists within the same cultural geography. Also, the study does not include a prominent Nigerian writer like Wole Soyinka. Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) strongly engages the city in various ways and deals with corruption as being the vernacular of the city. However, the researcher views the novel as one that provides a concordant

note on the city and is of the conviction that the selected novels are more representative of city trends. Similarly, the thesis does not make use of an important city novel like Flora Nwapa's *This is Lagos* because the village orientation of Nwapa's earlier novels tends to overshadow her later interest in city life.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

> The ways in which a culture writes about its cities is one means by which we may understand its fears and aspirations.
> – Peter Preston and Simpson-Housley **(**1994, 6).

The question of what the writer, particularly the novelist, does with the experience of the city is of great importance because of the special relationship between the rise of the city and the rise of the novel. The potential of the novel as a suitable vehicle for addressing the full range of contemporary issues, personal and political, local and national, may be compared to the development of the city as a location for an enormous range of people and activities. Indeed, the urban experience may have had its effect on the form and content of the novel as Malcolm Bradbury (1976, cited in Simpson-Housley, 1994, 6), points out: "one might argue that the unutterable contingency of the modern city has much to do with the rise of that most realistic, loose and pragmatic of literary forms, the novel." Thus, cities may have been seen as a kind of purgatory or hell, as in Eliot's "unreal city" where death has "undone so many," (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922, cited in Preston and Simpson-Housley,1994, 6) but they were also "generative environments" for intellectual debate and artistic experimentation, as well as "novel environments, carrying within themselves the complexity and tension of modern consciousness and modern writing" (Bradbury, "*Cities*," in Preston and Simpson-Housley, 1994, 6).

Writers have tended to look upon the city as inherently bad, or at best, a necessary evil that must be tolerated. Cities seem to exist in sharp contrast to the countryside; one 'natural,' the other 'unnatural.' It will appear that the countryside's potential for growth gives it the advantage of being labelled natural while the city's glaring decay and constant demand for maintenance has continued to work not in its favour making the people perceive it as being unnatural. Cities all over the world are regarded as deadly places to live in due to health problems resulting from contaminated water and air and communicable diseases. Garbage and sewage are also major problems confronting cities all

over the world. Other problems impacting negatively on the city include crime and high traffic. Because interactions amongst people take place more in the cities than in rural areas, there is a higher tendency for people to contract contagious diseases in cities.

Studies have also shown that crime rates in the cities are higher, the chances of punishment after getting caught are lower and the higher concentration of people in cities creates more items of greater value that are worth the risk of crime. The high concentration of people which creates traffic problems also results in less time being spent on more valuable activities. Apart from environmental problems, Louis Wirth (1938, 2) identifies other problems of the city when he asserts that the "city is characterized by secondary rather than primary contacts." He posits that although the contacts of the city may actually be face to face, they are nonetheless "impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmented" and adds:

> Our acquaintances tend to stand in a relationship of utility to us in the sense that the role which each one plays in our life is overwhelmingly regarded as a means for the achievement of our own ends. Whereas the individual gains, on one hand, a certain degree of emancipation or freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups, he loses, on the other hand, the spontaneous self expression, the morale and the sense of participation that comes with living in an integrated society (2).

The biblical reference to the City of Babylon as the Mother of Harlots and Abominations, of the Earth, (Revelation chapter 17, verse 5) seems to have set the tone for what Ofeimun refers to as "city bashing" in his article, **"**Imagination and the City" **(**2007**).** Ever since then, the human propensity to pick out what is wrong with a situation has ensured that each generation of writers attempts to find reasons to justify a discomforting notion of the city as the source of human failing. Plato anchors his negative view of the city in the unregulated interaction of people of higher and lower virtues in society which the city permits. He believes that this unregulated interaction has a capacity to induce a corruptive force which, although may be independent of human will, nevertheless is capable of making the society ungovernable. Plato prefers that human beings be restricted and regimented to predetermined roles so as to prevent corruption, dissidence, treason and instability. Consequently, he limits the size of his ideal city to the number of citizens who can be addressed by a single voice failing which cities are banned from his ideal republic.

In the Shakespearean age, the city is no less detested. Leslie Fiedler (1981, in M. C. Jaye, 1981, 116), observes that Shakespeare's urban plays including *Coriolanus, Timon of*

Athens, Measure for Measure, Troilus and *Cressida* "tend to be his most horrendous" (116). In all of these plays, Fiedler views Shakespeare's portrayal of the city "as a culture in which disloyalty and disease thrive, a place where life is sold for gold and syphilis eats away the human body" (116) The city comedies of Shakespeare's contemporaries also offer savage attacks on the vanity, greed, malice and deceit of city dwellers particularly those who represent a decaying courtier class and those who belong to a burgeoning trader class. Yet, Fiedler records that in the work of Ben Jonson, for example, it is incontrovertible that the experience of city life – its variety of character and language, the never-failing resourcefulness of its inhabitants in finding new ways of gulling and exploiting their neighbours – provides a kind of energising force for the drama. The words of Samuel Johnson that "a man who is tired of London is tired of life" (116) is relevant; such ambivalence is carried through into the following periods of literature.

There is the Industrial Revolution which is credited with radically transforming the more human *polis* into an impersonal hub of communications. Fiedler recalls that the transformation appeared to be a blessing rather than a curse initially as it created more work, more goods and eventually lifted more men and women above the subsistence level. Ironically however, he explains that it also raised expectations even higher and made those still excluded and deprived more aware of their suffering. Worse still, the Industrial Revolution is blamed for creating a kind of alienation of humankind from the natural world. Further to the impact of the Industrial Revolution is capitalism which exacerbated the already horrid circumstances of the early decades of the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism is widely criticised for institutionalising a culture of shameless profit seeking and exploitation of labour. It is believed to have created congested streets, where the craving for the means of livelihood reportedly turned millions into desperate opportunity seekers. Eventually, this twin evil led to what is generally regarded as the Romantic Movement and saw to the emergence of a class of poets known in literature as the Romantic Poets who saw the post-industrialised urban environment as essentially anti-poetic and destructive. Although the poets differed in their views, yet collectively they wrote great poetry in their total rejection of the modern city and were unanimous in their desire to withdraw into the friendlier environment of nature where they believed they could live and write poetry. To them, the surroundings of nature were natural and uncorrupted unlike the city with its smoke and slums which were created by the factories.

Thus, as industrialisation developed in Europe, what might be described as pastoral debate – City versus Country, Culture versus Nature and Mechanical versus Organic – took on a greater urgency as the city came to be regarded as the most obvious symbol of a new and pressing reality. Wordsworth, in Book VII of *The Prelude*, discovers in London some of the delights of variety and energy; but ultimately finds no difficulty in rejecting its sights, sounds and inhabitants. His images of London are conveyed in a sense of falsity so much that he sees in London: "those mimic sights that ape / The absolute presence of reality... imitations, fondly made in plain / Confession of man's weakness and his loves" (247-8,254-5, cited in Preston and Simpson-Housley, 1994, 4). Wordsworth admits that there is allure and entertainment from theatre to law courts, all of which London offers him and which culminates in his description of Bartholomew Fair as a crowded variety but his summing up of the fair also becomes his summing up of what the city means to him:

> Oh, blank confusion! And a type not false
> Of what the mighty City is itself
> To all except a straggler here and there,
> To the whole swarm of its inhabitants;
> An undistinguishable world to men,
> The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,
> Living amid the same perpetual flow
> Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
> To one identity, by differences
> That have no law, no meaning, and no end.
> (695 – 704, cited in Preston and Housley, 4).

Obviously, it is not difficult for Wordsworth to reject the city in favour of a different way of life. The Romantic poets note that the landscape itself exists only as perceived and becomes a metaphor for the observer's state of mind. Rana Singh argues that we see the city through the filter of the writer's imagination, which produces a very particular and idiosyncratic way of seeing.

Many writers view the city around the idea of alienation and oppression, the sense of how individual lives may be lost in the busy aggregation of the city. That aggregation, with its opportunities for losing oneself in the crowd may offer a kind of freedom and possibility but many writers often suggest in their writings that the freedom almost always proves to

be illusory. Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley (1994), chronicle the perception of the city as a place of violence and alienation in Elmore Leonard's *Detroit* and Bernard Mac Laverty's *Belfast.* They also make reference to Lorne Foster' description of Detroit as a city "of Hobbesian brutes in business suits, where civility in its full sense had broken down and the social contract is radically breached" (*Writing the City*, 1994, 10). In this city, "only the rules of confidence tricksters and casual violence apply; cops and robbers, operators and their marks are caught in an eternal dance" (11). In *Detroit* and *Belfast*, the cities have their human scale and have become symbols of disorder, because for the inhabitants of the cities, there is a link between urban decay and inner breakdown just as the presence in a community of one family from the "wrong" side of the divide leads to persecution and violence. There are sharp differences between the dwellings of the rich and of the poor leading to ignorance, incomprehension and conflict between the classes. The writer is both repelled and fascinated by the city.

The United States has a culture of anti-urbanism that dates back to colonial times. In fact, the American City Beautiful Architecture Movement of the late 1800s is believed to be a reaction to perceived urban decay. Anti-urban attitudes also dominate American literature as a result of which the national literature of the country deplores the city. Its mainstream writers are appalled by the Post-Industrial decay, dehumanisation and the curtailing of individualism which they perceive exist in the city but not in the countryside. White writers such as Melville, Hemmingsway, Dos Passos and Cheever all view the city as corrupting and diminishing of freedom. Hence, in their writings, they demonstrate a commitment to a cause – a wholehearted acceptance of the mandates of individuality which presumably, the city curtails. A similar hostility toward the city is present among black American writers as well although for reasons different from those of their white counterparts. "For Afro-Americans like Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, the streets of the city are the byways of hell" (Fiedler in M. C. Jaye, 116). Toni Morrison, in her classic essay, "City Limits**,** Village Values, Concepts of the Neighbourhood in Black Fiction**,"** gives two major reasons why the Afro-American writers detest the city. The first reason she offers is because:

> Black artists […] have not contributed to the major decisions in founding or shaping the city. Minor decisions, yes. The specious power of numbers, yes. The fraudulent repulsive power of the "patient," yes. For black people are generally viewed as patients, victims, wards, and pathologists in urban settings, not as participants. And they could not share what even the poorest, white

> factory worker or white welfare recipient could feel. That in some way the city belonged to him (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 37).

Morrison holds that the Black American writers who loathe the city do so not because the city lacks the presence of nature, serenity or peace as their white counterparts claim, but essentially because the ancestor is present in the village but absent in the city. She contends that the American countryside holds as many terrors for the black American writer as the city does and that what is missing in city fiction and present in village fiction is the "ancestor:"

> The general hostility to the city is not the result of the disappearance of grandeur or the absence of freedom. And the idealization of the country is not a pastoral delight in things being right with God. The advising, benevolent, protective wise Black Ancestor is imagined as surviving in the village but not in the city […]. When the Black American writer experiences the country or the village, he does so not to experience nature as a balm for his separate self but to touch the ancestor (39**).**

The tendency to dislike the city even, if for different reasons, also finds adequate expression in African literature no thanks to colonialism. To many African writers, the city is nothing but the Western outpost of callous living to which colonialism has condemned the African in the same way as did the Industrial Revolution and Capitalism in Europe. Ngugi wa Thiong'o offers a useful guide to understanding many African writers' attitude and disposition to the city in his presentation of the contrast between the Old and the New Ilmorog in his novel *Petals of Blood***.** For Ngugi, the contrast between the old Imorog (a village) and the New Imorog (a city) embodies the collapse of social morality. In the city, human values were trampled underfoot, rampant materialism, commercialisation of alcohol, undue high priority for tourists' demands, abjectness of shanty towns, and glorification of prostitution characterised everyday living of city dwellers leading to the emergence of a class system.

Among many African writers and commentators that treat the village as the pre-colonial African past is Ghana's Ayi Kwei Armah, who asserts that Africa was a Garden of Eden in terms of her social organisation prior to her contact with colonialism. His nostalgic view of the African past is anchored in the way people lived in harmonious communities sharing the fruits of their labour and never striving to compete unnecessarily with their neighbours for the acquisition of superior status or material goods. Armah also presents the pre-colonial African communities as being completely democratic and devoted to the principle

of reciprocity – a principle that is to become the essence of what he calls "Our way, the way" in *Two Thousand Seasons:*

> Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way is hospitable to the guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction (*Two Thousand Seasons*, 1973, 62).

The tendency of many African writers to view the city as being synonymous with colonialism and to judge it with the same harshness that the negative consequences of colonialism evoke in the minds of people finds an inroad into Nigerian literature. "Most Nigerian writers assume the artificiality of the city in the sense in which Ol' man Forest in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Beautiful Feathers* complains about noisy towns, and concludes that God made the village; but man made the town. Thus, the invasion of the simplicity that characterised the pre-colonial African life, the destruction of the communal way of sharing happiness and sorrow which colonialism engendered are believed to be intricately linked with the creation of Nigerian cities. Hence, Chinua Achebe notes in one of his essays that the western incursion should be blamed for creating African cities.

No Nigerian city has engaged the attention of the Nigerian writers the way the city of Lagos has done and is still doing. Successive generations of Nigerian writers often regard Lagos as the ideal setting for their works. Unfortunately however, the opinion of many of them about Lagos has tended to be coincident with that of writers who view the city as the problem of the world. *In People of the City*, which was written as far back as 1954, Ekwensi labels the city as "an enemy that raised the prices of its commodities without increasing his pay; or even when the pay was increased, the increased prices immediately made things worse than before (54). Interestingly, a research finding as recent as 2007, confirms Lagos as the second most expensive city in Africa. As part of the findings of a worldwide cost of living survey conducted by the research arm of *The Economist* News Magazine, the report compares prices and products in more than one hundred and thirty cities around the world and finds that Lagos comes second after Abidjan, Cote D' Ivoire which takes the first position in Africa. The report states that Lagos urban dwellers are among the hardest hit by high commodity prices and soaring accommodation costs. It adds that "Lagos was among the most expensive cities in the world in 2007 and ranks as one of Africa's cities with the highest cost of living" (*The Punch* Friday, March 23, 2007, 3).

As serious as this problem may seem to scholars and observers of city life, there are yet more problems confronting the city of Lagos. To begin with, the early planners of Lagos appear not to have reckoned with the fact that the city's population would soar to unimaginable proportions. The population of Lagos has grown rapidly in the last three decades leaving the city seething with filth, the homeless, an almost intractable daily gridlock and the far more sinister spectre of street urchins, otherwise known as area boys. There are countless other indicators that depict Lagos as a city on the brink; the endless surge of commuters towards a commercial bus with only a few empty seats; a young fellow dumping waste probably from his cart into the Lagoon unchallenged; the shutdown of a busy street by a partying crowd; high speed vehicles riding against the flow of traffic on one-way routes. It is an unending list of problems and woes.

Even before Nigeria attained independence and especially from the 1960s, Lagos has been regarded as the single most likely city capable of offering economic succour to scores of Nigerians who migrate from other parts of the country and the world into the city on a daily basis. This influx was increased by the oil boom of the 1970s. The boom lasted until the socio-economic burst of the 1980s which also got worse in the 1990s, but people have continued to move into Lagos in large numbers and presently, the city is reviled as chaotic and crime prone. Lagos residents are particularly transfixed by disturbing socio-economic indices in these areas – security, housing, transportation, education and roads. The fact that all the contestants in the 20007 gubernatorial elections in Lagos State emphasised, even if only out of perfunctory political obligation, the imperative of overhauling those sectors underscores the crisis state to which they have degenerated.

Also, the mass exodus out of Lagos, of the head offices of major corporate organisations were partly due to the menace of social miscreants, declining infrastructure and environmental standards and traffic congestion among several other problems Lagos is associated with (Adegoke, 51). Described as “the armpit of Africa” (*ThisDay*, 51), it appears that Lagos is the only city in Nigeria where slum clearance is one of the most important aspects of governance. Ofeimun (2007) discloses that since the 1930s, “governor after governor has earned folk-sobriquets as Governor Bulldozer, Action Governor and Harbour Master as a play up of the slum-clearance propensity of the regime in power” (Tejuoso, 2007: 56). A cruel joke told some years ago about how a first time traveller could tell when he is in Lagos encapsulates just one of the many disturbing defining

characteristics of Lagos. According to the joke, you know you are in Lagos when a putrid smell assails your nostril.

In view of the foregoing, it is hardly surprising that many Nigerian novelists do not view Lagos as a good city. In most Nigerian urban novels, prostitution is depicted as a way of life for women who desire to make money in the city. In *Jagua Nana's Daughter*, "Ekwensi exposes the height of human exploitation for monetary gain" through Auntie Kate's abduction of Jagua's daughter, Liza and pushing the innocent girl into the hands of her Greek lover who was in need of a child. Not satisfied, Auntie Kate "further enriches herself by providing business executives with young girls" (Ofor in Ikonne *et al*, 28). The corruption and sexual laxity in Iyayi's novel even outstrips that of Ekwensi's novels because in *Violence* for example, sexual recklessness is not a disease that afflicts only the young or unmarried, but also supposedly married men and women. Instructively, the moral decadence cannot always be attributed to poverty. Iriso, for example, is a government official and is 'doing well' while Obofun is a wealthy man. Curiously, all the characters in the novel that are sexually reckless and morally bankrupt are 'decent' at the beginning of the novel and very hesitant to give up their old values but all gradually yield to moral irresponsibility as a result of their experiences in the city which appear to predispose them to immorality. In the novel, both the rich and the poor engage in sexual immorality as each group struggles to cope with the pressures the city exerts on them. Interestingly however, Iyayi does not present the countryside as a better alternative. In fact, he insists through his characters that life in the village is far worse than what it is in the city because life expectancy is far shorter in the village than it is in the city.

Thus, the need both to render and to comprehend the multiplicity of the city has always been considered to be of great importance especially in fiction but no definite judgment seems to have been made on the processes of change and development that have issued in the city. Hence, for a writer like Charles Dickens, the city may be a location threatening and alluring, menacing, yet exciting. The very aggregation of experience that appals Wordsworth, offers to Dickens rich material, and his characters' experience of the city may be a mixed one. Dickens, perhaps, the most popular and rewarded novelist Britain has ever known and easily remembered as a compassionate observer, a reformer, an indignant denouncer of social evils, makes London the main locale of his novels. His heroes are often born and raised in the country but, like their creator, they soon make their way to the metropolis. His characters also make excursions elsewhere but they all return to London.

He writes both on his repulsions as well as what he approves of the modern city. Phillip Collins (1987) argues that it is not as if the early Dickens was horrified by industrialism and later enthusiastic about it. According to Collins, Dickens had no consistent thought-out notions on the matter, nor did his attitude to it develop along a single line. "Dickens is writing novels, not treatises aiming at comprehensiveness or objectivity." Accordingly, he selects "disparate elements from his experience and assessment of the industrial town" arguing further that Dickens had the good sense to recognise that neither a sweeping rejection of nor an uncritical rejoicing in industrialism was reasonable" (Preston and Simpson-Housley, 1994, 5). Hence, in his novel, *Nicholas Nickleby* for instance, Nicholas Nickleby's first sight of London offers a vision of London as frightening as in *The Prelude.* Like Wordsworth, Dickens achieves his effect partly through accumulation, by the sheer number of people and things to be seen and acquired in the city. In the first half of the novel, he presents a hostile and dehumanising city:

> Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shades and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult. (*Nicholas Nickleby*, 408, cited in Preston and Simpson Housley, 1994, 5).

In this London, Nicholas's father looks "among the crowd without discovering the face of a friend." (*Writing the City*, 5) Also in the same city of London, Nicholas experiences a sense of loss and alienation when he discovers that the plenitude of the city is formless and meaningless. Dickens however presents the same London as a compassionate city when the benevolent Cheeryble brothers discover Nicholas and offer him affection and companionship. Thus, as Dickens portrays the city as a place the reader will hardly expect two strangers to notice each other; let alone that one should offer the other a job, he balances it by creating small havens of retreat and redemption in the same city.

Also in his later works, he presents the city as a location to which he had to return perhaps, in order for him to record and interpret its rapidly changing physical appearance; or because there is something in the rhythm and variety of city life that stimulates his imagination. In this way, London is for Dickens, what Lagos is for Odia Ofeimun for whom the city inspires "a peculiar loyalty" (*Lagos of the Poets*, xix). Ofeimun confesses that "cities generally are trying places to live in and so deserving of being put on trial." He catalogues the many woes of Lagos as including "perennial lockjaw of traffic, insecurity of

lives and property, epileptic electricity and taps that run dry;" describing the city as "an over-crowded city" with "bad manners [...] already entrenched as a culture" (xxi). In spite of these failings however, Ofeimun insists that Lagos is "the place to stay, the place to go and return to, but not a place to get away from (*Lagos of the Poets*, 2009). Ofeimun's feeling and attitude to Lagos is like Dickens,'who's "attraction of repulsion" (Sharp and Wallock, 1987, 116) kept his imagination faithful to the city. Ofeimun's feeling for and loyalty to Lagos is also similar to that of Ben Okri who is essentially an urban writer and whose novels describe the lives of young male Lagos dwellers. His books portray Lagos in arresting colours and depict the city as a grim carnival of avarice at the same time. Robert Fraser (2002), reveals that Okri is a great admirer of Dickens and that like Dickens, he writes about "the beauty and confusion" of the city. Okri's books dig into the origins and imaginative cohesion of the city, with emphasis on the re-interpretation or the spiritualisation of the modern urban space (22). Fraser observes further that "the Lagos of Okri's novels [...] bears much the same relationship to [...] the London of *Oliver Twist* [...] It is, in other words, magnified, intensified, rendered mystical." Okri also confesses that "the ghetto was the place I've felt most at home because the terms on which everyone lives are so transparent. There is one code. Survival – but survival with honour and style. There was an extraordinary vibrancy there, an imaginative life" (Fraser, 17).

Similarly, Raymond Williams (1973), believes that Charles Dickens was affected by the experience of the city and that his response to the city experience was various and penetrating.

Bill Freund (2007), traces the evolution of cities from a variety of beginnings into sites where more and more complex activities take place and avers that "at a certain point historically, the city may look parasitic on the productive countryside where the balance between human beings and nature is so much better sustained but that further along the line, the city becomes the logical home for multitudes of social and economic activities that are fundamental to the material life of mankind; and with that, the balance between city and countryside changes (Freund, vii). Freund observes that "cities attract friends and enemies" and that while the city may be a symbol of wisdom and balance, of good life and of democratic politics, it is also the site of alienation and oppression "where modernity becomes a prison for man and woman (vii).

However, Freund insists on not passing a moral judgment on the city according to him not because the kinds of moral judgment often passed on the city lack validity within particular discourses and for particular individuals or types of individuals, but because of his belief that the future of Africa is likely to be increasingly urban. In confronting the rural-city bias which he notes affects much African studies, particularly in the English language scholarly tradition, Freund discovers that rural and peasant studies have easily represented themselves as the true Africa insisting however that not only does urban studies have a historic place in Africa of some importance, but that this importance has continued to grow. He affirms that the city is the more likely residence of the citizen urging African studies to situate themselves on an urban foundation.

He also draws a distinction between modernist interpretations of the city and postmodern approaches and expresses a preference for the postmodern thoughts due to what he describes as "the strength of some postmodern insights" (vii) even while admitting to personal prejudices of being largely modernist. Freund observes that much of African literature sees African cities as essentially dysfunctional and dangerous places. He understands the trend to be against the backdrop of African society having been shaped by rural survival strategies and rural identities. He also recognises the negative impact of urban life on city dwellers especially as big cities battle to cope with burgeoning population without corresponding industrialisation and economic development. He admits that the management of cities that work effectively for their inhabitants has not been possible in Africa. Hence, city life in contemporary Africa is nightmarish. However, he also identifies a counter trend which sees African cities as the fount of cultural creativity as older rural-based ways of life either fade or contain radically new elements. It is in this trend that Freund sees the seed of a new Africa that can overcome present dilemmas about the city.

Dwelling on the distinction between the modernist and postmodernist approach to looking at the city, Freund identifies the dream of the successful city which accompanied independence for African nationalists as being a modernist dream, noting however that "it is a dream which has faded painfully (142). By contrast, he classifies much of the literature which honours new African urban social forms as being postmodern while reiterating his earlier stance not to take sides in the clash between modernist and postmodernist visions of the city but trying to make discernible what is attractive and contradictory in both.

Freund posits that "the independence era" had its impact on the character of urbanisation in Africa especially given the importance of capital cities. A noticeable feature of post-colonial Africa, he observes, has been the steep growth of administrative centres explaining that this was what has made Lagos surpass Ibadan to become the largest Nigerian city and indeed, the largest in Africa south of the Sahara. According to Freund, the enormous importance of government as source of income and opportunity is reflected in the way a new kind of modernity has sprung up on an unprecedented scale in the cities "typified by the presence of institutions of higher education, of significant health facilities, of development agency headquarters, and of such prestige structures as sports stadia and international grade hotels" (146). Freund recalls that not only did government employment expand dramatically after independence; the government workers attracted services and commercial activity and acted as role models for friends and relatives in rural areas to come to the cities.

Thus, urban life, Freund further recalls, became the stage for a desired and increasingly Africanised modernity – the place where Africans could become "cosmopolitan." Unfortunately, a disturbing but dominant feature of rapid urbanisation in Africa, he notes, has been the failure of the urban economy to offer jobs to the floods of new urbanites. Worse still, there has continued to be increasing presence of women who could not be categorised as officially married. The reality has been that the city has yielded to the emergence of a new culture characterised by festivities, music, cinema (which has given way to video film), associated activity, sport and other activities that have emanated from and are taking place largely on the urban terrain. Freund cites the example of how in the late 1990s, the development of 'reality' rap or 'Bongo' rap became a slang name for Dar es Salam, 'Bongo' being Swahili word for smart or clever symbolising the new reality in the post-colonial African city where inhabitants have to be clever or smart to survive in the city. Other African cities are also filled with their own distinctive languages and idioms. The misery of the modernists concerning urbanisation in Africa, in Freund's view, is that the cosmopolitan dream that they could eliminate the unseemly and unsightly through government action turned into a nightmare as big cities like Lagos have become:

> [...] vectors that triangulated the combined effect of several disastrous circumstances.They began to be seen as problematic representations of a new and troubled urbanism. They were great cities with little public transport, chaotic land tenure policies, poor access to remunerative structured employment, lacking in the public spaces that give the citizens of a city – in conventional

> modernist parlance – a sense of belonging and pride. As uncontrolled settlements spread on a far bigger scale, they threatened to overwhelm the functional urbanism inherited from colonial times when shack building was largely held in check (*The African City: A History*, 2007, 150).

Freund notes however that the above catastrophic view of the city is not shared by the postmodernists. He recalls how a certain Peter Marries (1960), produced what Freund describes as "a very critical and insightful study of urban removal in Lagos defending the way of life of the Lagosian slum dwellers whose intricately linked if poorly serviced built environment served their needs, emotionally and sociologically, as well as economically" (153). The postmodernist voice on the city, Freund observes, is gradually being heard more thereby blocking the modernist observers of African cities.

One of the dominant views of the postmodernists on the city is that the parasites, the shack-dwellers, the unemployed women, instead of being seen as dragging down healthy forms of development in the city, should be looked at as the authentic builders of African cities. Freund cites the example of Andrew Hake's classic study of Nairobi called the "self-help" city and published in 1974 in which Hake posits that the poor dwellers in the city, far from being parasites, are there for a reason – "to make themselves and their families a better life" (153) adding that they also perform important services, create their own employment and make useful contributions to the economy. Freund's account confirms that the postmodernists' view of the city also holds that the poor dwellers in the city do not drag down the economy but are actually engaged in building it up.

Viewed from this perspective therefore, Freund opines that the crisis of urbanisation is not entirely a catastrophe because if the poor choose to live in the urban centres, it must be because that is where market or other forces decree them to go. He observes that "the city has higher birth rates and lower death rates" (163) maintaining that this is one of the most important reasons why people stay there and not necessarily because of the links to the "industrial and communication core of wealth to which they have very little access." (163). According to Freund, the city is where new forms of organisation are matched with new cultural forms and where the static and ethnographic African art based on tradition and the countryside look for innovation within a globalised world.

He celebrates the distinguished Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas, who, in getting to know Lagos, declares that he has come to know the city not merely as a "welter of disaster, chaos and crime, but also as a place where massive traffic jams inspire equally massive numbers

of informal sector traders to find their customers and where the complex processes of waste disposal lead to the creation of vast numbers of jobs and to ingenious forms of recycling" (Rem Koolhaas in *Under Siege*, 2002, 183. cited in Freund, 164). Freund also quotes the Dutch architect as having described Lagos "as a patchwork of self-organisation that has evaded the rigorous organisations of '70s planners" (Rem Koolhaas in *Under Siege*, 2002, 183. cited in Freund, 164). Freund proposes that cities have long-term trajectories and do not entirely change from one era to another. The post-colonial decades, he observes, have added important layers to existing and expanding notions of the city adding that catastrophe versus creativity is a paradoxical approach which is part of a clash of ideas about where cities are heading today. He admits that African cities in particular are unable to progress in accordance with the strictures of colonial planning and colonial values but maintain that whether or not African cities are now moving in the direction of new and more realistic governance regimes is the question.

He concludes that "considering various trends alongside each other seems more useful than merely subjecting them to an all-purpose 'Afropessimism' that obscures the variety of often contradictory movement and prevents us from grasping any sense of a way forward." (165). Freund avers that there is no simple way or formula for understanding the city and predicts that the future of the city is open-ended, uncertain and not lacking in contradictions. Notwithstanding the uncertainty and contradictions associated with the city however, he is resolute in his conviction that "the African city will continue to exhibit vitality and will more and more be the place where African futures are decided" (196).

Edward Glaeser (2011) agrees with Freund that cities can be places of inequality because they attract some of the world's richest and poorest people and expresses his conviction that the poverty in a city often shows that the city is functioning well. According to him, part of the problem of the city is that whenever people crowd together; it is more likely that disease will spread and water will become contaminated. When those crowded people are disproportionately poor, then the risks increase, because they have fewer resources to handle such problems. He is of the opinion that cities attract poor people because they are good places for poor people. Glaeser finds studying the city "so engrossing because they pose fascinating, important, and often troubling questions." In his book, *Triumph of the City* (2011), he asserts that cities have been engines of innovation "since Plato and Socrates bickered in an Athenian marketplace" (1). Not losing sight of the personal experiences of many city dwellers which seem to suggest that city roads are paved to hell

and that the inhabitants of the city are at the losing end of the triumphs of the city, Glaeser nevertheless posits that cities have and will continue to expand enormously because urban density provides the clearest path from poverty to prosperity.

He concedes that every urban childhood is shaped by an onrush of extraordinary people and experiences some of which may be good while others are not so good since there is much of urban squalor as urban splendour. He maintains however that "how well we learn from the lessons our cities teach us will determine whether our urban species will flourish in what can be a new golden age of the city" (2.). Taking a firm positive view of the city, Glaeser queries the anti-urbanites of all ages and debunks Mahatma Gandhi's declaration that "the true India is to be found not in its few cities, but in its 700,000 villages" (7) and that "the growth of the nation depends not on cities, but on its villages." Glaeser insists that "the great man was wrong," asserting that India's growth depends almost entirely on its cities and that there is a near-perfect correlation between urbanisation and prosperity across nations (7).

According to Glaeser, studies have shown that on average, as the share of a country's population that is urban rises, by 10 percent, the country's per capita output increases by 30 percent adding that per capita incomes are almost four times higher in those countries where a majority of people live in cities than in those countries where a majority of people live in rural areas. He further debunks the myth that even if cities enhance prosperity, they still make people miserable submitting that on the contrary, people report being happier in those countries that are more urban. Giving more insight into the findings of his study, Glaeser explains:

> In those countries where more than half of the population is urban, 30 percent of people say that they are very happy and 17 percent say that they are not very or not at all happy. In nations where more than half of the population is rural, 25 percent of people report being very happy and 22 percent report unhappiness. Across countries, reported life satisfaction rises with the share of the population that lives in cities [...]. Cities boost not only India's economy but its mood. The cities are the places where their nation's genius is most fully expressed (7-8).

For Glaeser, the ability of the urban centre to create collaborative brilliance is not new since for centuries, innovations have spread from person to person across crowded city streets. Although, there are clearly urban distress but not all urban poverty is bad in Glaeser's view. He argues, for instance, that cities do not make people poor as widely

believed. In his view, cities only attract poor people adding that the flow of less advantaged people into cities demonstrates urban strength, not weakness, pointing out that this fact about the city should be celebrated, not condemned or criticised. Expatiating further on his position, Glaeser proposes that urban poverty should be judged not relative to urban wealth but relative to rural poverty. He contends that the flow of rich and poor into cities makes urban areas dynamic although he admits to cities not being pleasure zones.

Highlighting the advantages of living in the city which he believes include the fact that cities enable us to find friends with common interests, he notes that "the disproportionately single populations in dense cities are marriage markets that make it easier to find a mate" (11). He reiterates that the strength that comes from human collaboration is the central truth behind civilisation's success and the primary reason why cities exist. He counsels humanity to try to understand cities rather than condemn or criticise them advising further that the things we need to do include holding on to the truths about our cities; despatching harmful myths and discarding the view that environmentalism means living around trees (11). Glaeser wants urbanites to always fight to preserve a city's physical past; but above all, he wants humanity to free itself from the tendency to see cities as their buildings emphasising that "the real city is made of flesh, not concrete" (11). Focusing his study of cities on developing countries, Glaeser makes a special reference to Lagos noting that the suffering of the inhabitants of Lagos can be so intensive and extreme that observers can hardly be blamed for concluding that Lagos is hellish (70). However, he consoles with the revelation that even in the developed world, cities are disproportionately poor recalling Plato's observation twenty-five hundred years ago that "any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other of the rich" (69-70).

As regards the often touted unfavourable condition of cities like Lagos, Glaeser insists that the presence of poverty in a city is a reflection of urban strength, not weakness and that urban growth is a great way to reduce rural poverty. He reiterates his earlier submission that cities are not full of poor people because cities make people poor, but because cities attract poor people with the prospect of improving their lot in life. He believes that the poverty rate among recent arrivals to big cities is higher than the poverty rate of long-term residents, which, in his view, suggests that over time, city dwellers' fortune can improve considerably. He maintains that rather than worry about the poverty rate in cities like Lagos, we should worry more about places with too little poverty. According to Glaeser,

our concern ought to be "why do such cities fail to attract the least fortunate?" (73). Glaeser asserts that a city's population tells about what the city offers and that the absence of poor people in an area is a signal that it lacks something important for the least skilled. The great urban poverty paradox, according to Glaeser, is that if a city improves life for poor people currently living there, that city will attract more poor people. Hence, in respect of the persistent negative portrayal of Lagos in literature, Glaeser's study finds that:

> Lagos [...] is often depicted as a place of profound deprivation, but in fact the extreme poverty rate in Lagos [...] is less than half the extreme poverty rate in rural Nigeria. About three quarters of residents have access to safe drinking water, a proportion that is horribly low but that is far higher than any place else in Nigeria, where the norm is less than 30 percent (73-74).

In his book, *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox (1965), celebrates the city. He celebrates the shape, style and organisation of the city. He believes the shape of the city involves anonymity which he contends is often attacked only by those who misunderstand it as dehumanising arguing that anonymity protects humanity from the oppressive determination of the law. He holds that the shape of the city also involves mobility which he opines is attacked only by the reactionary who cling to permanence; whereas, in his view, mobility is deliverance from the immobile gods of place which kill life. Cox celebrates the style of the city because he conceives it as involving the functional-pragmatic approach to truth and its unity which he asserts is embodied in John F. Kennedy. Although Cox admits that the style of the city involves profanity, "having to do with this world," he insists, however, that life does not depend upon gods or myth or metaphysics as is often claimed in the village but upon personal decision and responsible control and exercise of power. He celebrates the organisation in the city because it involves what he describes as needed flexibility.

In celebrating the city, Cox acknowledges the limitations of the city's claims and warns of its dangers. He nevertheless celebrates urbanisation; he is warm to its delights which he maintains indicate a movement from the tribe bound by mythology, to the city, free from myth and metaphysics and "presided over by its teams of functioning-pragmatic technopolitans (Smylie, 1966, in Callahan, ed, 9). Cox recalls that it took two millennia to realise an inclusive metropolis which Smylie, in Calllahan's "recollection of published reactions to the book" (2) interprets to mean that there has been a progress of man from tribe to information and an assumption of responsibility in the city. Thus for Cox, the old

tribal society seems to have vanished and supercity – the metropolis of automation, mass communication, mobility and anonymity is at hand.

Similarly, Max L. Stackhouse (1966, cited in Callahan, 26) studies the city and concludes that it is the symbol of progress, excitement and freedom from drudgery; although he concedes that it is also the symbol of moral decadence, oppression and loss of authentic identity. According to Stackhouse, the variety of possible interpretations of the city is matched only by the multifaceted character of urban life.

Among the many possible interpretations of the city, Stackhouse identifies three efforts as having particular significance for the major conflicts and disputes of city life. These are the Communist, the Catholic and the Sectarian Protestant branches of modern culture – all of which he testifies to having produced documents that have had long-range consequences. He recalls an article in the *Peking Review* (No. 36, September 3, 1965, 9-30) in which Marshal Lin Piao, the then China's defence minister calls on the world's people to join China in a war to destroy "United States imperialism" (Callahan, 27). Stackhouse recalls further that a key metaphor on which China's minister bases his interpretation and recommended strategy is the conflict between the countryside and the city. According to him, Lin Piao not only capitalises on the "perennial myth of the moral inferiority of the city and hostility of the 'pure, simple folk toward city slickers,'" the thesis of his article becomes the basis for his picture of the entire world situation. The city, Lin Piao reportedly posits, "is the seat of the imperialists, who usually begin by seizing the main lines of communication," whereas:

> The countryside is the seat of the real people who protect the world from the imperialists who always try to exploit them […] The countryside and the countryside alone, can provide the revolutionary bases from which the revolutionary forces can go forward to victory. […] Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called the "cities of the world," then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute the "rural areas of the world." [...] In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by rural areas (Callahan, 1966, 27).

Interestingly, Stackhouse believes that Max and Lewis had contempt for rural life arguing that any honest reading of the Marxist literature would reveal that the expected leaders of the world's revolution were to be the urban proletariat, the industrial workers – not the rural peoples. He observes however, that "under the claims of an absolute logic and of a mechanical destiny in history, we find an interpretation directed against the city and all that

urban citizenship represents" (27). Stackhouse further submits that a letter sent on June 21, 1965, on behalf of Pope Paul VI by Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Cicognani to the President of the French Semaines Sociales illustrates a type of symbolic and moral interpretation of the city that is held by many religious persons. Stockhouse quotes the letter as having pointed out that:

> Absolute and permanent values, closely linked to human nature and in a necessary relation with the supernatural end of the person, are threatened by urbanisation, the extent of which radically modifies the traditional way of life of families, shatters the structure of society and is not without grave consequences for the social adjustment of individuals and of families and for their religious behaviour (28).

According to Stackhouse, the letter urges participant in the *Semaines* to seek ways of "not only safeguarding these ultimate but possibly strengthening them in the midst of the revolutionary changes." Stackhouse contends that the Papal letter suggests recognition of the effects of urbanisation and city life as "the sign, the cause and effect of a radical transformation in society […]." He further interprets the letter as suggesting that urbanisation bears the dangers of "anarchy, banalisation of thought, depersonalisation of man, anonymity and agglomeration of solitude." He senses below the surface of the letter a fear of heterogeneity and a preference for "organic wholeness, harmony and integrity for society – an establishment governed, much on the model in the Greek polis, by and for spiritual and rational man on his way to a heavenly city of God" rather than the earthly city of man (28).

Stackhouse's third interpretation of the city is illustrated by a tractarian paper back from a Sectarian Protestant perspective, which he notes has become the handbook of large segments of Protestant clergy, bureaucrats, laity and some progressive Catholics among whom he seems to contend Harvey Cox to be. He opines that Cox's notion of the city is "a vision of man's possibilities and a potential fulfilment of the promises reality makes to man." (28).

What Cox calls humanity to celebrate, Stackhouse opines, is that modern man can find significant meaning in the city where nature no longer has mystical power and where the values that integrate lives are not necessarily located in tribes or even ideologies. Stackhouse is convinced that this is the core of Cox's position in view of Cox's assertion that although urban Africans in the city may continue to organise around ethnic

associations in the city; they may continue to hold with belief systems created in rural areas; they may continue to react with indifference or hostility to key urban institutions; they may continue to retire to the countryside or allow their children to be brought up there; they may continue to believe in the supernatural and witchcraft; but they live a life in the city in which the ancestors who dominate rural ideology and legitimise rural life have faded in importance. In most cities, it is a vast array of urban churches which provide forms of networking, sociability and succour in times of need. Even where ethnicity remains important, it is often defined in new ways that reflect urban competition. Hence, Cox's treatment of sex in the city is that of a functional-realist view rather than a "romanticised mythologisation of the sex act" (3). Stackhouse believes that to Cox, the city is a symbol of modern culture. It is the place to "conceive of and evaluate styles of life, sets of values, ranges of hopes and expectations, coteries of preferences and strategies that are a prequisite for urban life." Stackhouse also asserts that the city is not a city, but "the city," symbol of contemporary urban culture (30). Cox holds a strong view of the city as locus of change and differentiation. He criticises modern writers who portray the city with a vision of plummeting decay, describing them as victims of misplaced nostalgia who make unsuccessful attempt to sound prophetic.

Stackhouse's personal submission on the city begins with the acknowledgement that heterogeneity, which is one of the dominant features of the city, provides richness in life that is invaluable. He also recognises that another characteristic of the city, anonymity, sometimes frees us from the oppressive power of the law. However, he cautions that in a pluralistic urban society, people need some sort of community life to stand between the highly personal 'I' in the city and the impersonal consensus of the countryside. According to him, "people need community life to keep liberty from becoming license, to keep freedom from the law from becoming anomie, anonymity from becoming alienation" (30). He maintains that the city is only the modern setting of people, adding that it is an artefact that is made, not given. He counsels that if the made world of urban life is to survive, the perennial urban tension – city versus countryside – must be removed, reiterating that it can be removed only when adequate middle-level institutional centres of identity are provided (30).

He therefore calls for the creation of new centres of social solidarity and stability in which people may participate, with which they may identify and around which new forms of social life may nucleate. In his final submissions, Stochhouse rejects what he describes as

the absolutisms of Lin Piao and Cardinal Cicognani and upholds Cox's views on the city because it is "the best so far" (30).

In his prefatory remarks to Max Weber's *The City*, Don Martindale (1958), notes that "the observation that man thinks, feels, responds differently in the city than outside it is as old as the city itself; adding that people who lived in the previous ages were as perceptive and intelligent about the city as we are. He chronicles humanity's positive attitude to and acceptance of the city from ancient times. According to Martindale, traditional evidence testifies to the fact that ancient men perceived and valued the special properties of their cities. Hence, it was a familiar concern of fathers in ancient Egypt that their children could learn to write and take up the "white collar" tasks of scribes in the imperial bureaucracy rather than suffer the privations of humbler occupations. Similarly, in Babylon,

> […] the high value placed on superficially urban types of socio-political opportunities is shown in the care with which the attempt was made to restrict access to such opportunities to privileged groups of citizens. When the Jews were carried off into Babylon captivity, they were permitted much freedom but carefully excluded from access to the priestly schools and the political positions correlated therewith. In Ancient China, the desirability of urban roles is indicated by the devotion, patience and hard work the individual was willing to devote in preparation for the civil service exams and the extent to which his family and clan might finance his activities in training for the mandarinate. In classical Greece, the citizen was proud of his membership in the city and he took this quality as a distinguishing difference between himself and barbarian. Similar attitude and civic pride differentiated the denizen of Rome (Weber, 31).

Similarly, Georg Simmel (1903) cited in Martindale (1958) agrees with many modern observers that the city is peculiarly central to the destiny of modern people. He absolves the city of blame regarding impersonality which often characterises the behaviour of people in the city. Martindale records Simmel as arguing that the individual in the city is subject to an unusual volume of stimulation which compels the development of a mentality capable of protecting him against elements in the external environment that could uproot him. This, Simmel further argues, means that he must react with his head rather than his heart for to yield to deep emotional reactions is to be crushed in the city. According to Simmel, the environment of the city dweller, not his feeling, intensifies his awareness. Hence, his attitude toward others tends to be one of formality and reserve. Simmel believes that the inner aspect of his reserve is not only indifference but also a slight aversion or at least strangeness and repulsion (Weber, 34).

He observes further that the modern mind in the city becomes ever calculating because in city life, calculability is required by the complexity of life. Hence, he believes that "the great creativity of ancient Athens was […] its retention of some of the aspects of a small town […] with the stimulating intellectuality of the metropolis" (Weber, 34). He avers that while the number of persons makes the city the locale of freedom, "within the city […] life has been transferred from a struggle for a livelihood with nature into an inter-human struggle for gain. And life is increasingly composed of impersonal components that displace personal colourations […]" Thus, as Oswald Spengler, quoted by Don Martindale observes, "the city [...] is something more than a constellation of institutions and administrative devices – courts, hospitals, schools, police and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is, rather a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organised attitudes and sentiments [...]. The city has its own culture (34-35).

Indeed, the narrative inscribed in the present-day city is not necessarily one of loss or decline. What matters are the multiplicity and the babble of voices. Individuals are pursuing their own concerns, seemingly taking little notice of one another, but this is not seen as part of a narrative of distance or alienation, rather, the single lives are part of the city's collective life. Today's treatment of the city celebrates resonance, variety, jumble, medley, profligacy and coexistence. When characters experience desolation, indifference, disregard, loss, solitude and being adrift, their feeling is not particularly attached to the city; it derives from their past experience, something they bring to the present moment rather than something the moment imposes on them. The contemporary novel assumes the existence of no normative city meta-narrative, against which the city of today or the feelings of any of its inhabitants may be judged. Today's novel offers an example of the postmodernist view of the city in terms of the inability of any discipline, including literary studies, philosophy or the social sciences to deliver totalising theories and doctrines, or enduring "answers" to fundamental dilemmas and puzzles posed by objects of enquiry. Hence, there is a growing feeling that "a chronic provisionality, plurality of perspectives and incommensurable appearances of the objects of enquiry in competing discourses make the search for ultimate answers or even answers that can command widespread consensus a futile exercise." (Saul Bello, *More Die of Heartbreak*, 1987, cited in Preston and Simpson-Housley, 9).

Yet, there are scholars who posit that the negative literary image of the city should not be a subject of concern or even a source of worry in literature because no work of art validly

represents reality. In his essay, "The Puzzle of Anti-urbanism" (1981), Leo Marx holds that literary minds should not regard the literary treatment of cities as a question of representational accuracy. According to him, any investigation of the image of the city which proceeds on the assumption that literature "reflects" reality as a means of conveying a sense of the relationship between art and life will be inaccurate. This is because passages dealing with a particular subject such as the city will cease to have significance once they are detached from their immediate literary context and compared either with each other and or with what people know about those real cities in the writers' society. For Leo Marx:

> No work of art, including the work of the most literal minded, programmatic, realistic novelist, bears direct, unmediated relation with raw experience. There are significant differences between the planes of abstraction on which the relationship […] may be established. […] it makes no sense to approach the work of writers on the plane of direct sensory experience, as if the writers were attempting to convey exact images of the real thing. (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 69).

Going by Leo Marx's model, it may be safely assumed that the often negative depiction of the city and city life in literature is not truly representative of the "realities" in the city and that the problematic relationship between literature and the city may have been blown out of proportion. But most commentators and scholars of city literature have argued and submitted that the relationship between a work of art and reality is more than a casual one. While many scholars and writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o have taken the extreme position that a work of art that fails to reflect reality is not worthy to be considered (*Homecoming*, 1972, xv-xix), other scholars like Blanchant (1999) maintain that literature, at the very least, provides a "modified reflection" of reality. Also, Sharpe and Wallock (1987), observe that Dickens' "fictional passages correspond to certain external realities" (110).

It is perhaps in reaction to the inability of writers and commentators on the city space to come to a common agreement regarding the status of the city in literature that Murray Bookchin in *The Limits of the City* (1986), submits that "we should look for the elements which foster a municipal identity within cities which can also lead to cultural change." Also in Pedro Juan Soto's essay, "The City And I" (1981), which examines the Puerto Rican experience in New York City, Soto affirms his agreement with, and belief in Dean Howells romantic idea that "the division of the city into villages and hamlets would make it liveable." According to Soto, Howells asserts that:

> Urban life would be nourished by the friendship of the new comers, would be strengthened by the mutual aid displayed by such people and the characteristic coldness of the city would be changed by basic human warmth**.** (Cited in M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, 190).

This appears to be the position of some of the contemporary urban novelists like Nigeria's Maik Nwosu, whose novels seem to suggest that the breaking down of the city into neighbourhoods which tends to foster a feeling of camaraderie will not only make the city more liveable, but will also reduce its negative image in literature. There is yet another advocacy; it is about an evolving culture in which people live in-between the city and the countryside referred to as suburbia. Jesse Kartuem (2007) observes that the people who live in suburbia have similar aspects to those who live in an urban landscape as well as those who live in a rural landscape describing it as a hybrid of the two. According to Kartuem, there is something special about acquaintances in suburbia. Children, parents and the like are much more likely to be involved in some sort of social group, sports group or club depending on how one looks at the social construction of such a place.

Another area of interest in the perception of the city is gender. Not only are women increasingly being made protagonists in some urban works, African women may also be seen as fulfilling three key functions in city novels. The first is to enjoy the city as a place of refuge where they find true liberation, for the first time, from the clutches of traditional practices that have tended to degrade them and diminish their individuality for so long. The second is to suffer at the hands of the city's violence and indifference. In Festus Iyayi's novel, *Violence*, we see the damage caused to women who live in the city, but play no part in its active life. Lilian, Obofun's daughter, is pathetically spoilt and irresponsible in spite of her father's wealth and affluence. Queen, his wife, is not only adulterous, she also engages in endless drinking of whiskey ostensibly to drown her sorrow since her husband is busy chasing other people's wives. In the same novel, a woman is similarly driven into sexual immorality by poverty that the indifferent city offers no way of relieving as is the case with Adisa's forced infidelity with Obofun. The third function is to offer some kind of redemptive escape from the city's excesses. At the end of *People of the City*, it is through his marriage to Beatrice the Second that the protagonist, Amusa Sango, can hope to discover a new life. Similarly, the hope that can be found in Atta's novels particularly *Everything Good Will Come* is wholly gender-related, and can be understood as deriving from her feminism and belief that the true political literature of our time is writing that

allows not just men but men and women to become educated and better people and to share in our collective burdens.

Of all the scholarly commentaries, submissions and approaches to looking at the city, the approaches and assertions of Bill Freund (2007) and Edward Glaeser (2011) are particularly insightful. Freund's appraisal of the modernist and the postmodernist approaches to understanding the city is fascinating; especially his submission that in spite of being a modernist, he finds the postmodernist approach of "considering various trends alongside each other" more useful than merely subjecting them to an all-purpose 'Afropessimism.'

Similarly, Glaeser's (2011) position is intriguing particularly the way he uses the life story of Richard Wright to enunciate his position on the city-versus-country debate. Glaeser recalls that the great African-American writer, Richard Wright was born in Natchez, Mississippi. He and his mother moved north, first to Memphis and then to Chicago, seeking to escape racial laws as much as to find economic opportunity. Wright's northern exodus, according to Glaeser, freed him from the harsh racial laws of Mississippi, but it didn't immediately bring him "redeeming meaning" (*Triumph of the City*, 2011, 80). In Chicago, he started off working as a porter, then an errand boy and a dishwasher. He sought a better life by working for the post office and got a full-time job working the night shift at Chicago's central post office; then the world's biggest. The job was a good one to the extent that it allowed him to do some writing. Even more important, it connected him with a left-wing literary salon, He was brought into a group of ten in the south side of Chicago that met to argue current events.

Wright was laid off when the Great Depression drastically reduced the business of Chicago's mail-order houses, and he began a "peripatetic" stream of jobs, selling life insurance on commission, cleaning streets, digging ditches and eventually working for the Michael Reese Hospital, a job he got through the wife of the great urban sociologist, Louis Wirth who also got him work writing the history of Illinois for the New Deal Works Progress Administration. He moved to New York in 1937, working on the WPA publication New York Panorama which Glaeser contends remains a wonderful description of big-city living. In 1938, just a year after moving to New York, Wright won $500 prize for a short story. His first book, a collection of stories titled *Uncle Tom's Children*, was published by Harper and Company. He won a Guggenheim Fellowship to write *Native*

Son, and with that, he became a literary lion. Thus, in nine years, Chicago and then New York had brought him from struggling porter to successful writer despite the fact that this was during the Great Depression. In Glaeser's reckoning, "talent and the urban ability to match talent to task had won" concluding that Richard Wright's history suggests that areas should be judged not by their poverty but by their track record in helping poor people move up in life. (Glaeser, 80-81).

Glaeser's position is useful in the sense that if an environment is attracting continuing waves of the less fortunate, it is succeeding. His criticism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1979) cited in Glaeser (2011), that "cities are the abyss of the human space" (247) is also acceptable. Glaeser argues that Rousseau "had things completely backward" and declares that cities enable the collaboration that makes humanity shine most brilliantly. In Glaeser's view, by attracting people from diverse cultures, cities magnify humanity's strengths maintaining that the achievement of cities, which include democracy, printing and mass production to mention only a few, benefit the entire world; and that the ideas that emerge in cities eventually spread beyond their borders and enrich the rest of the world.

Glaeser's ideas are very helpful because humans learn so much from other humans, we tend to learn more deeply and thoroughly when there are more people around us and when we are face-to-face with other people. Hence, Jagua Nana 'succeeds' better as a prostitute when she relocates to Lagos where she not only gets more clients but also more prostitutes to 'work' with; her glamour, magnificence and candour become realised in Lagos even though she has always had the tendency to be wayward and promiscuous right from her days in her native Ogabu village. "Urban density creates a constant flow of new information that comes from observing others' successes and failures" (Glaeser, 83). In a big city like Lagos, people can choose peers who share their interests just as Taneba and Tamuno find each other in *Alpha Song;* Ashikodi finds his 'compatriots' slum dwellers in *Invisible Chapters*; Odili Samalu finds Rex in *A Man of the People* and Atta's heroine in *Everything Good Will Come* eventually finds her women activist peers with whom she chooses to work in an NGO and because of whom she abdicates her marriage.

This work further affirms Glaeser's submission that "how well we learn from the lessons our cities teach us will determine whether our urban species will flourish (2)." Cities make it easier to watch and listen and learn and because the essential characteristic of humanity is our ability to learn from each other, cities make us more human.

CHAPTER THREE

WRITERS' VIEWS OF THE CITY: CYPRIAN EKWENSI AND CHINUA ACHEBE

Although Cyprian Ekwensi wrote a particular book which he titled *People of the City*, almost every book he wrote could have been given the title because Ekwensi takes the city as a normal development from the rural area. Even when his characters insinuate that the city is an artificial creation while the village is natural, the impression the reader gets from Ekwensi is that the city grows out of the mixing of several people in a particular environment. Undoubtedly, therefore, Ekwensi is a believable story teller in respect of the city.

For Chinua Achebe, it is almost as if Nigeria would not have had cities if not for colonialism. However, documentary evidence reveals that there were cities in Nigeria before colonialism. Layi Egunjobi (1999) asserts that "It is an established historical fact that urbanisation in Nigeria predates the British colonial administration (3)." Similarly, in his 1964 article "The Evolution and Analysis of the Retail Structure of Lagos, Nigeria's Akin Mabogunje recalls that "in West Africa, […] the roots of cities were already present in the form of indigenous towns, some of which had populations of over 50,000 by the time of the advent of the first European"(3). He however agrees that the growth of African cities is due largely to the political domination of the continent by Europeans. According to Mabogunje, the city of Lagos, though relatively small at the time but with a favourable location "with respect to the new commerce oriented toward Europe and outside world," owed its rapid growth to European domination (5).

These historical facts perhaps partly explain why Achebe's aversion to the political and cultural domination of Nigeria by Europe finds adequate expression in his city books where he demonstrates an almost unfriendly attitude towards the city. For Achebe, the city of Lagos symbolises the legacy of Europe's inglorious domination of Nigeria. Hence, tribal divides also come out strongly in these books. "'We are strangers in this land. If good comes to it may we have our share.' Amen. 'But if bad comes let it go to the owners of the land who know what gods should be appeased.' Amen" (*No Longer At Ease*, 1960, 5-6). Indeed; Achebe's city novels portray him as an ideologue for the ethnic card.

People of the City tells the story of a young journalist and part-time band leader from Eastern Nigeria, Amusa Sango sojourning in a big Nigerian city with a desire "to forge ahead." Although the author does not name the city but indications in the novel (such as references to familiar streets in Lagos) suggest that the setting is Lagos. A highly didactic novel, Ekwensi divides the book into two equal parts each with a clear message. The first part is about "how the city attracts all types and how the unwary must suffer from ignorance of its ways," while the second part focuses on "when all doors are closed." The author seems to conceive of the city as a place that holds much allure, a place that promises much but delivers nothing but misery and death to its dwellers. Ironically, Ekwensi does not seem to believe that the countryside is preferable to the city. Instances abound in the novel where the village is referred to as the source of the protagonist's poverty.

Hardworking, determined and focused, Amusa Sango arrives in the city with the added advantage of a caring mother's constant warning to be wary of all distractive elements especially city women that can stand in the way of his achieving his life ambition. Things appear to be going on well for some time. Sango has a promising job as a crime reporter with a frontline newspaper, *The West African Sensation.* Also at his spare time, he plays music at the "All Language Club" thus earning extra income. Sango's diligence and commitment to high quality reporting through painstaking investigations and a knack for thoroughness is commendable; but all these fail to see him through the distractions of the city; especially the one his mother consistently warns him about – city women. In no time, he gets entangled with Aina, a poorly raised city girl whose association with Sango brings distraction, shame and blackmail, just as his friendship with Bayo, a city lad who confuses his life ambition with infatuation and gets destroyed in a fatal love relationship with a Syrian girl. In reporting the tragic murder of his best friend, Bayo, Sango allows his emotion, personal relationship and loyalty to his friend to conflict with professional ethics

thus incurring the wrath of his employer who promptly issues him a summary dismissal from his hitherto promising career.

Earlier, he loses his place at the "All Language Club" to political intrigues as a powerful city moneybag and his resentful landlord, Lajide, buys over the place purposely to spite Sango and to prevent him from having access to the place. This is to teach him a bitter lesson for supporting and playing for a rival political party. At the end of the novel and in line with the author's purpose, all doors are closed to Sango. First, he is ejected from his residential apartment and has to move his property to a public place – the railway station. Now homeless and a squatter in a one-room apartment that can barely take a bed which he and his host take turns to sleep on, he can no longer afford the luxury of a house boy. Then, he loses his favourite past time and avenue for making extra money. Finally, he loses his regular employment. Worse still, his mother takes ill, is brought to the city for treatment and surgery but dies. Aina also accuses him of impregnating her and resorts to extortion and blackmail. The only light at the end of the tunnel for Sango is his providence – arranged meeting with Beatrice the Second and his marriage to her at the end of the novel. It is a marriage that holds a promise, a promise that is however not to be fulfilled in the city, but in far away Gold Coast.

Jagua Nana chronicles the escapades of a middle-aged Eastern Nigerian prostitute, Jagua Nana, in the permissive Nigerian City of Lagos. Whimsical, shameless and decidedly irresponsible, Jagua considers Lagos as the 'ideal' place for the practice of her trade – prostitution because she has learned that Lagos is the place where people are free and uninhibited; a place where "anyone who cared could go roaming the streets … from one night spot to the other right up till morning" (*Jagua Nana,*167- 168). Jagua Nana has all it takes to lead a decent and dignified life. She is the only female amongst four children born to a catechist, later a pastor. She enjoys the love and adoration of her parents especially her father who dotes on her as a growing child. She is well nurtured and properly raised, a beacon of hope to her religious parents and the envy of her siblings. She also has the good fortune of having been raised in the countryside, an environment that is supposedly devoid of negative influences; but if any negative influence can emanate from the village, Jagua is both its harbinger and the only one capable of giving full expression to it. Jagua is vain, frivolous and hopelessly unserious. Rather than take part in the activities of the church of which her father is the pastor; instead of occupying her time with a rewarding vocation, Jagua's daily routine while she lives in the village consists in meaningless engagements

such as painting of her face, changing clothes, bathing several times in a day and such other activities that portray her as frivolous and unserious:

> Jagua was fond of changing her clothes often [...] painting her face. Every few hours she went down to the waterside and took off her clothes and swam […] the boys used to […] peep at her breast and […] she […] always teased them. […] All the girls in her age – group had married […] but she had resisted [...] She considered herself above the local boys, most of whom she had bedded and despised as poor experience (166**).**

However, the hope and prayer of Jagua's parents to see their daughter marry like other girls in the village materialise when a successful businessman from the coal city of Enugu comes to the village and seeks her hand in marriage. Her father promptly gives her out to the man in a befitting marriage ceremony and she goes to live with her husband. But what appears to be an innate irresponsibility in her, the persistent and unrelenting crave for 'freedom' is not to allow her settle down to matrimony. It is a nightmare for Jagua that all she has to do is cook and submit herself to a man whose daily preoccupation does not go beyond strategising on how to expand his business. It is totally unacceptable to her that as early as 8 o'clock in the evening, everywhere should be "shut and the stalls deserted" (168). Worse still, her marriage fails to produce children and she desperately desires a place where it will not be "odd to be wandering about." Lagos is therefore the ideal place for her to actualise her 'dream' of wandering.

In Lagos, Jagua sets about satisfying her desire and realising her life ambition. Seducing and capturing man after man, young, old, educated, unlettered, including die-hard criminals; Jagua's image in the prostitution trade becomes larger than life and she is a frontline member of a popular night club – The Tropicana. Altogether, Jagua spends ten years in Lagos, they are ten wasted years as she has nothing to show as reward from the 'trade' to which she has devoted many of her active years. The last few months of her stay in Lagos are most degrading; Jagua lives as a squatter with a younger prostitute in the most slumming of Lagos slums where she sometimes sleeps on the "bare floor which came off in powdery puffs" (165). By the time she is to leave Lagos for the village, the very place against which she turned her back ten years earlier, she has to "go round her former friends ... to borrow some money" (175) to enable her undertake the journey. In *Jagua Nana***,** the reader is once more confronted (characteristic of Ekwensi's submissions), with the lures of the city which beckons on people of all shades and character promising much, but delivering nothing to them. Also in sharp focus in this novel, is the mystery that surrounds

the city. The city bewitches its dwellers, imprisons them and renders them totally helpless, unable to extricate themselves from its clutches such that they prefer the lowest and most degrading standard of living in the city to a quiet and dignified life in the countryside.

Iska is about the growth of a young Nigerian girl from adolescence to adulthood capturing her struggles, her adventures and eventual death. A novel with three distinct settings with bold statements about each of them, *Iska* tells the story of Filia Enu, an Eastern Nigerian girl who is born and raised in Kaduna but who later sojourns in Lagos in pursuit of fame and fortune where she meets her untimely death. Although Filia is born into an environment of strife (Kaduna) where tribal conflicts are the order of the day, she is totally unaffected by the hatred around her. She is trained in the convent and while still in her teens, she meets and innocently falls in love with a young Northerner, Dan Kaybi, an equally detribalised individual. He often incurs the wrath of his fellow Northerners for his relentless defence of the Igbo race. Apparently living ahead of his time, Dan Kaybi loses his life in a senseless tribal wrangling at about the same time that Filia travels to her birth place in the East for the funeral of her father. Devastated by the sudden death of the love of her life with whom she has secretly tied the nuptial knot shortly before travelling from Kaduna to her village, Filia decides to change her environment and Lagos is easily her choice. She desires to be a model in addition to being a television personality in order to earn a living.

Upon her arrival in the city, she is confronted with a myriad of problems. First her sister, Jewel, who is married and whom she has envisaged no problems staying with, gives the indication that accommodating Filia will not be as easy as Filia has imagined. The reasons soon become clear to Filia as her sister's husband begins to show signs of intolerance forcing her to move out. A hitherto unspoilt and well-raised girl from the province, Filia becomes enmeshed in the chaotic Lagos life and in a desperate attempt to find her feet in the city, she meets, mingles with and receives tutorials on coping strategies from people of questionable character including a semi-prostitute, a thug, and a religious hypocrite, among others. She wades through it all and it appears at a point that she has overcome the storm; she gets comfortable even to the point of renting an apartment of her own and inviting her mother to come to live with her in the city so as to oversee her 'moral' codes. She also meets a responsible boutique owner and a happily married woman for whom she works and earns a comfortable living for a while. Life appears to be fulfilling for Filia as each day

offers her a new kind of excitement the climax of which is her meeting with a dashing journalist with whom she falls in love.

However, as predicted at the beginning of the novel through 'mallams' and 'seers' and also in accordance with the premonitions Filia has always had about an impending doom, her life is rudely terminated at its twilight. In line with the purpose of the author, the city, mysterious and very destructive, is responsible for Filia's sudden and untimely death. She falls into the hands of some unscrupulous city dwellers whose stock in trade is kidnapping of innocent and unsuspecting citizens for ritual purpose using commercial transport later to be known as 'one chance.' Although Filia does not die in the hands of the kidnappers, she witnesses the disappearance of other victims and the concoction she and others are fed with ensures her eventual death, thus confirming the notorious status of the city as a place that offers enjoyment to its residents but destroys them eventually.

No longer at Ease tells the pathetic story of a young, newly educated Nigerian from the Eastern part of the country, Obi Okonkwo, who returns to Nigeria on completion of his education in England to become a Lagos resident. Crucial to the narration of events in *No Longer at Ease* is that Obi is not a conventional city dweller. Unlike the usual city dwellers that make deliberate decision to take up residence in the city either because they are attracted by the city's glamour or they believe opportunities abound in the city but are lacking in the countryside; and who therefore make conscious and determined effort to cope with city life, Obi's sojourn in Lagos is impliedly exigent and mandatory. With a bachelor's degree in pre-independence Nigeria when the destiny of the country is still in the hands of the colonialists, Lagos, the then nation's capital city, is the only place where Obi can put his certificate into use through a white collar job; hence he remains a passive inhabitant of the city throughout the novel; unable and unwilling to comprehend and come to terms with the city. While in England, Obi has lofty dreams and ideas on how he intends to use his education back home to impact positively on his country; and he is essentially a thinker rather than a doer in all he sets out to achieve.

Fresh from England, Obi takes up an appointment in the senior civil service in Lagos where he attempts to settle down and live for the first time, a truly independent and adult life devoid of undue interference. Perhaps to underscore his full adulthood, he falls in love with Clara, another educated girl from Eastern Nigeria who travels in the same boat with him during his return trip from England. The climax of their romantic relationship is their

engagement signalling their preparedness to become husband and wife. Life is made even sweeter for a young man of his age who, as a proud owner of a new car, is immediately admitted into the emerging class of Nigerian elite whose mode of greeting is "how is the car behaving?" (90)

Notwithstanding Obi's prospects for a happy life however, problems and conflicts soon rear their ugly heads in his life causing him pain, sorrow and despair. First, Obi's parents and indeed, everyone around him take strong objection to the proposed marriage between him and Clara anchoring their disapproval in the *Osu* caste system in Igboland which forbids a 'freeborn' from contracting marriage with an *Osu*. Even Joseph and Christopher, Obi's friends who ought to have been liberated from the shackles of primitive culture by virtue of their cosmopolitan outlook and education, are horrified by Obi's seeming insensitivity to a serious cultural matter. They are prepared to do everything to ensure that the marriage does not happen. Also confronting Obi are problems regarding his financial obligations. His aging parents need his financial support including his having to take on the responsibility of paying his younger brother's school fees. Perhaps more pressing is the issue of his 'scholarship' to England which is 'awarded' by the Umuofia Progressive Union and for which he has to commence repayment upon his securing a job.

The most devastating of all pressures however seems to have emanated from the city, for while he can explain his limitation to his parents and secure their understanding and sympathy; while he can and actually asks for the deferment of the repayment of the loan he took from his town union; the financial demands of the city such as his electricity bills, insurance premiums, income tax, vehicle license renewal fees, cost of maintaining and servicing his car and himself as a city elite can neither be put down nor postponed. In a desperate bid to make ends meet and cope with the financial pressures of the city, Obi plunges into corruption which is endemic in the city and which other city dwellers appear to him to be using to 'forge ahead.' It turns out to be a catastrophic plunge because Obi lacks both the resourcefulness and the experience to carry him through. In no time, the long arm of the law catches up with him through a 'set up' and he is committed to prison accordingly. Obi's life and especially the fact that all investment on him seems to have been a waste, constitute not just the tragedy of an individual whose life and potential for greatness come to avoidable ruin, but the tragedy of a nation which denies itself the possibility of regeneration after working very hard to achieve same. In *No Longer at Ease*, the city is fingered as the architect of Obi's failure which can be taken as the collective

failure of the country's future. The city, through the pressures it exerts on its naïve inhabitant, appears to have driven him to self destruction.

A Man of the People is a comic novel satirically chronicling the adventures of a young college teacher, Odili Samalu, both in his country's capital city and out of it. Odili may not, in a strict sense, be described as a city dweller because he does not take up permanent residence in the city. Perhaps, he can be regarded as an aspiring city dweller although his aspiration fails to come to fruition throughout the novel. Significantly however, his brief visit to the city, a visit intended to be a casual one through a mere holiday creates a profound metamorphosis in Odili's world view and indeed, his entire life such that after the visit, his life is completely altered.

As a college teacher in a neighbouring village, Odili is initially pleased both with his life and the modest progress he makes in his profession. However, his former teacher and an elected Member of Parliament in the city, Honourable M.A. Nanga, encounters him during the honourable's political visit to the school. Apparently delighted at seeing his former student, Nanga immediately invites Odili to the city. There are two dimensions to the invitation. One is to serve a long-term purpose and it takes the form of an admonition to Odili to "come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service" (13). The other is to be an immediate, short-term visit to the city using the school's holiday period during which the honourable minister promises to use his political influence to ensure Odili's selection for a government scholarship to study for a postgraduate certificate of education in London.

Although Odili is not keen on securing a government scholarship to do a postgraduate programme abroad having had the good fortune of enjoying government scholarships for both his secondary and university education, the prospect of visiting the city is nonetheless a welcome one to him for the frivolous reason he hopes it will give him to see his girlfriend who is training to become a nurse in the city. Odili undertakes the visit to the city and the visit turns out to be a symbolic one. His experience in the city – much of it borders on frivolity – his reaction to that experience, and the consequences of his reaction all combine to set in motion a series of life-transforming activities that begin with a summary dismissal from his hitherto relatively comfortable and self-sustaining teaching job. As soon as Odili arrives in the city and discovers the opulence in which the honourable Member of Parliament Chief Nanga lives, his resentment of political office holders on account of their

corrupt practices begins to wane and he confesses to having no more room for criticism in his mind.

Thereafter, his closeness to the minister boosts his self-confidence and greatly enhances his sense of self-worth. His confidence soon rises to the point that enables him to commit his first 'city sin' by sleeping with a white woman who impliedly has been a regular lay of the minister but who settles for Odili when the minister is not available. This and other morale-boosting experiences of Odili in the city including his confident, if needless rhetoric while sharing a privileged dinner with foreigners, imbue him with the courage to stand up to his host when the latter outwits him and seduces his girlfriend – Odili's real motive for visiting the city. The altercation between the two men over this incident brings Odili's vacation in the minister's house to an abrupt end but he does not leave the city immediately. He relocates to his friend's house to plot his revenge against the minister. Apart from the planned snatching of Chief Nanga's intended 'parlour wife' to punish him for the misdemeanour of sleeping with his ex-student's girlfriend, Odili is delighted to discover that his friend, Max, has a political agenda – the formation of an opposition political party – which Odili believes will serve as yet another platform for the actualisation of his revenge against Nanga. Now emboldened by the acquisition of greater financial resources, through his new found political party, Odili launches a near fatal attack on his former teacher not only to snatch his intended 'parlour wife' but also to contest the same elective position against him. The attack is unsuccessful apparently because although Nanga is corrupt, insincere and ruthless, the activities of Odili and his tendencies do not however set him apart as being significantly different from the man he seeks to humiliate and destroy.

Towards the end of the novel, Nanga 'wins' his election 'unopposed' while Odili languishes on a sick bed in the hospital having been beaten to a state of coma when he attempted to attend Nanga's campaign meeting unnoticed to learn new political tricks. Nanga's victory is however short-lived as a military coup which takes place shortly after the election not only disbands Nanga and his fellow corrupt politicians, but also ensures that they are all put in prison. This provides an undeserved opportunity for Odili to successfully woo Edna, Nanga's intended second wife, whom he hurriedly marries apparently to avoid a situation in which Nanga may regain his freedom and prevent him from actualising his dream. In contracting the marriage with Edna, Odili again

demonstrates his corrupt tendency by 'borrowing' from the funds his political party kept in his care to pay his wife's bride price.

One of the major submissions of Ekwensi about the city to which he constantly draws the attention of the reader and which is present in *People of the City* is the tendency for city dwellers, irrespective of age, gender, social or financial status to live in a kind of rat race. Every inhabitant of the city seems to have come to the city in search of money and more money. The purpose for which money is being sought varies from character to character but they all seem united in their common goal to make money. For Amusa Sango, his determination to make money at the beginning of the novel is simply 'to forge ahead' but at the close of the novel, his reason changes. Sango now wants to make money to show his father-in-law that "it was not only those who were born into high society who became somebody" (119). Bayo's quest for wealth also begins on a legitimate note. He succeeds in arousing the reader's support and sympathy when he explains to his friend, Sango that:

> I have suffered too much in this world and now I have made a decision [...]. Everybody is becoming something. I must become a serious man and move with the times (66).

But what begins like a noble resolution of a decent and determined young man soon assumes a dangerous obsession as Bayo launches into quackery. He gets involved in penicillin racketeering and impersonation of medical personnel. Posing as a medical doctor and engaging the services of another man as a fake nurse all in a bid to make quick and undeserved money, Bayo and his collaborator attempt to dispense fake penicillin and syringes. Lajide is by no means a poor man. But in spite of his wealth, he cheats and double-crosses equally dubious business partners all in an effort to make more money. In Aina's case, her quest for money is as frivolous as it is pathetic. She tells Sango pointedly that "It's money I want now […]. I want new clothes. The native Accra dress […]" (69-70). After her imprisonment, her mother's behaviour also reveals that she encourages her daughter to go and make money so as to sustain her and there is enough indication in the novel to suggest that Aina's mother supports and encourages her daughter's parasitic behaviour with Sango. Thus, in Ekwensi's view, city dwellers are plagued by an obsession with money. This obsession also keeps driving them from desperation to mistakes some of which often prove catastrophic. In *Jagua Nana*, Ekwensi similarly submits that all his characters are in the city "to make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money" (6). He declares further that "money was the idol of the women, an idol worshipped in every waking and sleeping moment" (30). To validate

her creator's claim, Jagua abandons her boyfriend, Freddie, in the Tropicana Night Club because "money always claimed the first loyalty" (15).

Similarly, Achebe declares through the Umuofia Progressive Union in *No Longer at Ease* "that it was money, not work that brought them to Lagos" and that "anyone who likes work can return home, take up his matchet and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino" (72). In *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga's life is dominated by corruption and avarice. He pretends to be working in the interest of public good, whereas his relentless effort at ensuring the construction of a road through his village, Aninta, is actually secretly aimed at oiling his own private pocket as "he had ordered for luxury buses to ply the route as soon as it was tarred" (48). Nanga also shamelessly collects bribe from a government contract and builds blocks of luxury flats with it notwithstanding the fact that he lives in a "princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven alarming water closets"(46). His desperation at retaining his seat in parliament as shown by his effort first at bribing Odili and later at humiliating and destroying him, also shows the depth to which he has sunk in his corrupt tendencies. Honourable T.C. Kobino is as avaricious and crude as Chief Nanga.

Another issue of common concern to Ekwensi and Achebe is the definite feeling of gloom and despondency that tends to dominate the psyche of city dwellers, no matter their level of achievement in the city. Nearly all the characters in the selected novels of both writers can be described as being unhappy with their lives. In *People of the City*, Sango's father-in-law, who appears to be the only happy man, and who for sometime basks in the euphoria of his achievement, especially his daughter's engagement to a medical student of acceptable parental background, ends up being a sad man. His daughter's fiancé dies suddenly, thus creating an opportunity for Sango to walk into her life. However, the prospect of his daughter getting married to Sango – a man of no means, no noble parentage, is an unhappy one to him. He agrees to the wedding only reluctantly and on the day of the wedding, the father of the bride "sat like a statue […] moaning his loss" (119). Lajide is a successful man going by the criteria for success as understood by the people of the city. With numerous houses, cars, lots of cash, a harem of wives and innumerable concubines, perhaps, no inhabitant of the city in the world of *People of the City* can be expected to be happier than Lajide. Sadly, however, his life is as unfulfilling, miserable and tragic as those of his fellow inhabitants of the city. Part of his misery is occasioned by his demonic quest for more wealth despite being wealthy already. Not satisfied with the huge profit involved in the buying and reselling of stolen lorries from his equally dubious

business partners, for example. , Lajide plans to double-cross them so as to make even more money at their expense but his plan is foiled by one of his wives. He dies suddenly in the novel.

Chief Taiwo's life in *Jagua Nana* is no less miserable and pathetic. He is supposedly a man of high repute, an astute politician, a party stalwart and consummate polygamist with three wives. In spite of these and other achievements, however, Chief Taiwo offers Jagua a casual ride in his exotic Pontiac automobile and willingly becomes her sex slave; dutifully paying the rent for her one-room apartment and furnishing it to high taste. He is regular and punctual on Jagua's bed every night abandoning all his wives. He becomes entangled with Jagua to the extent that he takes her to all his political meetings and Jagua soon assumes the role of his political campaigner especially among market women. On the day of the election and realising that he has lost, Chief Taiwo hands over to Jagua the briefcase containing all the money he has accumulated, ostensibly for safekeeping. This turns out to be their last meeting and Jagua eventually spends all the money, thus reaping the reward of Chief Taiwo's dubious sowing.

Gadson Salifa of *Iska* ought to be a happy and fulfilled man. He is employed, married to a beautiful wife and blessed with children. However, his happiness is truncated suddenly by Piska Dabra, a religious charlatan who illegally takes over his wife and impliedly causes him mysterious impotence. Gadson consequently suffers untold embarrassment, humiliation and ridicule especially in the hands of Filia Enu who is now a typical city girl and desperate for sex. Gadson's sudden impotence also puts a tragic seal to the festering ambition of Filia's mother who plans to marry her daughter off to Gadson so as to save the young girl from impending destruction. Perhaps, the most worrisome outcome of Piska Dabra's snatching of Gadson's wife is the consequence on Gadson's children who are abandoned by their mother and deprived of normal upbringing by both parents. The implication of this development is seen in the way Gadson becomes disorganised, distraught and finally suffers an emotional breakdown, thus becoming another unhappy inhabitant of the city.

Achebe's focal character in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okwonkwo, elicits the reader's sympathy. Long before his problems begin, Obi cannot be described as a happy man or a contented individual. He appears to be a man perpetually in a trance, deriving no joy from his environment and taking no pleasure in interacting with people around him. He is a confused man without a clear direction in the city. He hates the slums of Lagos with a

passion. “I can’t understand why you should choose your dressmaker from the slums” (15), he admonishes his girlfriend, Clara, in anger; yet Obi detests the peace and quiet of Ikoyi, his own place of abode with equal intensity. “Going […] to Ikoyi […] was like going […] to a funeral. For all its luxurious bungalows and flats and its extensive greenery, Ikoyi was like a graveyard” (16). These are confused and conflicting statements which can only be a reflection of Obi’s unhappy state of mind. Similarly, Joseph, Obi’s ‘countryman,’ is an unlucky man having fallen into the bad ways of the city with the consequence of his life being characterised by aimless wandering. Despite being very mature in age (he is much older than Obi), Joseph has no definite plan for his future, neither does he have a purpose for his sojourn in the city. He works as a mere clerk in a government department and occupies his spare time with women, the cinemas and dance halls.

One issue that seems to be of common interest to Ekwensi and Achebe is what appears to be a pre-determined negative perception of the city and city life such that sometimes, long before their characters take up residence in the city, their minds have been prepared towards certain negative attributes of the city. These negative assumptions about the city are sometimes made so real and believable that newcomers into the city come prepared to act in accordance with the pre-determined judgment thereby moulding and shaping the city ethic usually along increasingly negative path. Both authors in their city books reveal their characters’ preference for generally painting the city in a bad light. In nearly all Ekwensi’s city books, the city is almost depicted as a victim of blackmail in the sense that the novels nearly always imply that what makes a city deserving of its name, necessarily consists in its capacity to breed prostitutes, criminals, cannibals, rapists and the dregs of society.

The story of the life and times of Jagua Nana for example can be used to illustrate how the city can become a victim of not only blackmail but also of abuse and misuse. Long before Jagua comes to the city, she has chosen the path she intends to follow. At the time the novel opens, Jagua is forty-five years old. She is a full grown adult who cannot be said to be easily impressionable. The novel also reveals that Jagua loves sex, revels in admiring her body, and enjoys sampling men in bed and comparing their sexual prowess. Besides, she does not appear to have any serious ambition in life beyond dressing fine and swimming in “clean cool water” to the admiration of men who “drew to her side and wanted her (166).

Therefore, the city seems to have little or no impact on the psychological or attitudinal moulding of Jagua. From the time she lives in the village up until her marriage and sojourn

in the coal city, she has always been preoccupied with thoughts of breaking free and living loose. She is easily bored and it does not come as a surprise to the reader that she finds her marriage unfulfilling because her husband is not "Jagwa-ful." She complains that he never takes her to parties and does not dress well (167). Because Jagua wants nothing but a life of promiscuity, she sets about looking for ways and means of actualising her dream. She then hears about Lagos apparently from people of similar disposition whose main pursuit in the city is vain living:

> She had heard of Lagos where the girls were glossy, worked in offices like the men, danced, smoked, wore high-heeled shoes and narrow slacks, and were "free" and "fast" with their favours. She heard that the people in Lagos did not have to go to bed at eight o' clock (167).

Thus, the city is already defined by the likes of Jagua. The activities of Dennis Odoma and his philosophy about life also tend to support the assertion that the city can become a victim in the hands of its residents. Dennis is young, bold, courageous and energetic; but he chooses to put his youthfulness and energy into wrong use in the city. He is a diehard criminal, ruthless and dangerously daring. Dennis has no qualms about sleeping with Jagua, a woman old enough to be his mother; yet, there is no evidence in the novel to suggest that Dennis' misguided philosophy is as a result of parental neglect. He claims to have made unsuccessful attempts to secure a job but when he interacts with Jagua who advises him to give up his wild ways for the sake of his life and that of his girlfriend, he bluntly turns down the good counsel and vows to continue with the dangerous and precarious way he lives in the city. He anchors his philosophy in a game of chance concluding that whatever fate befalls him can only be a matter of luck: "I young and wild and I got no fear of anything" (125), he boasts to Jagua.

Similarly, Achebe's hero in *No Longer at Ease* gets his mind prepared if not 'poisoned' about the negative things he is to expect from Lagos long before he takes up permanent residence in the city. The novel recounts that before Obi's departure to London for further studies, he spends a few days in Lagos during which his country folk, Joseph, sees the need to let Obi know all the 'important' characteristics and attributes of Lagos. Joseph considers this 'gist' to be so 'important' that both men stay awake till past three o'clock in the morning from the previous evening. "Dancing is very important nowadays" (12), Joseph tells Obi with interest. He also tells him other 'important' things about Lagos including the cinema and dance halls as well as the fact that he succeeds in retaining the attention of a

girl for a full five months emphasising that this is an extraordinary feat in Lagos. Perhaps, the high point of Joseph's narration, one that boosts his self esteem, is the revelation that his girlfriend (whom he admits has already broken up with him), was a virgin at the time of their first meeting, reiterating that virginity "is very rare here" (13). On his part, Obi is fascinated by the stories of Joseph's escapades; but these stories also go a long way to serve as the basis for Obi's first and enduring impression about Lagos as a "strange and sinful world"(13). It is instructive that this early negative impression does not yield to a positive one when Obi returns from England and becomes a Lagos resident; especially as he meets and makes friends with Christopher, an incurable womaniser.

Furthermore, Achebe seems to view Lagos as a 'busybody' city where inhabitants not only drift aimlessly, but also preoccupy themselves with activities which ought not to be of concern to them. On the day that judgment is delivered in respect of the bribery allegation involving Obi, "every available space in the courtroom was taken up;" and "there were almost as many people standing as sitting" (1). City dwellers are depicted as being so nosy that "some civil servants paid as much as ten shillings and sixpence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day" (1). Ekwensi seems to hold the view that city inhabitants must necessarily come to ruin as a result of the corrosive influence of the city. In *Iska*, the heroine's mother blames the city for all the undesirable changes she notices in her daughter. "I don't know what has become of my daughter since she came to the city" (119), she laments bitterly. The heroine's summation of Lagos and its influence on its residents is even worse than that of her mother:

> This was a place as artificial as plastic dishes, as treacherous as the eroding hillside of Milikan Hill. This was what they called Lagos; a circus, a cinema show [...] a home of bastards. Here it seemed essential that men and women must continue to plunge headlong into disaster (125).

Filia's eventual plunge into disaster and death at the end of the novel is impliedly facilitated or directly caused by the city going by her vituperations regarding the city. The immediate circumstances of Filia's death which occurs in the city are emphasised in complete disregard of the actions or inactions of the heroine and especially the fact that her death had been predicted long before her sojourn in the city. She confides in Dan Kaybi that:

> When I was very young […] mother took me to see a fortune teller. Do you know what he said? He did not mince words. You will die

> young. That's what he said […] sometimes I see signs that it may be true (35).

Similarly, the protagonist of *People of the City***,** Amusa Sango regularly blames the city for sundry offences in his reports in the *West African Sensation*. In one of such reports, he asks rhetorically, "the question I must ask the people of the city is this; why was the young woman killed in this heartless manner?" (19). Kofi also holds the city single-handedly responsible for the death of Beatrice the First disregarding her own failings. "Why did she come to this city at all? The city eats many an innocent life like hers every year (112). There are insinuations in *Jagua Nana* that the city, through its unfettered freedom, is responsible for the loose life Jagua leads in the city. Achebe also blames the pervasive corruption in the city for the misfortune that befalls his hero in *No Longer at Ease*. As a young man studying abroad, Obi Okwonkwo has a saintly view of his country, Nigeria. He has faith in the potential of the country and even a greater faith in himself as a representative of the newly educated Nigerians who can take the nation to the biblical Promised Land after chasing away the parasitic colonialists. This belief is contained in his address to his fellow Umofians shortly after his return from England:

> He told them about the value of education. "Education for service, not for white collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly" (29).

However, Obi is confronted, immediately on arrival in Lagos with the systemic corruption in the country through a customs official designated to conduct his arrival formalities. Having informed Obi that the import duty on his radiogram is five pounds, the official proceeds to make an unsolicited offer of 'assistance' even when Obi is clearly prepared to pay the official rate. "I can be able to reduce it to two pounds for you. But you no go get government receipt" (27). Obi declines the offer of 'assistance' but realises as he gradually settles down to city life that not only is corruption endemic in the city, the city people see it as a way of life. The driver of the lorry in which he travels from Lagos to the village takes him to task for daring to attempt to stop him from bribing a policeman, because, according to the driver, the attempt, apart from constituting an unnecessary interference, will only cost him even more money:

> Why you look the man for face when I want give um him two shillings? […] Na him make I no de want carry you book people

> […]. Too too know na him de worry una [,..] that policeman go charge me like ten shillings (39).

In accordance with the driver's prediction, the policeman charges him ten instead of two shillings and to compound Obi's misery, his fellow passengers launch verbal attacks on him for his "too know." Achebe seems to suggest further that corruption in the city is not restricted to the illiterate members of the city's population but that it is widespread among the city inhabitants. Christopher comes across in the novel as an educated young man. Like Obi, he rides a car but he is always unequivocal in his argument with Obi that he sees no wrong in taking bribes as long as the bribe giver gets what he bargains for. "If the applicant is getting the job anyway, then there is no harm in accepting money from him" (111). Christopher is more of an experienced city-dweller than Obi having lived in the city for a comparatively longer time than his friend. His view of the city will therefore tend to be believable. Clara, Obi's girlfriend, has a similar mind-set as Christopher. Upon Obi's narration of his encounters with Elsie Mark and her brother both of whom had attempted (in different ways), to corruptly induce him to favour their bid to secure a government scholarship to study abroad, Clara's reaction and response are indicative of Achebe's submission on the corrupting influence of the city:

> When he finished, Clara said nothing for a little while. "Are you satisfied?" asked Obi. "I think you were too severe on the man," she said (86).

Clara sees nothing wrong with her boyfriend gratifying himself in any way open to him.

It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that Obi begins to reconsider his stand on corruption after examining and pondering over the attitude and submissions of people around him. Besides, what greater encouragement could a young man of Obi's age get than one from a serving government minister, the Honourable Sam Okoli, whose obscene display of ill- gotten wealth and drunken utterances further propel Obi to embrace corrupt tendencies.

> Everyone said it was impossible to win. They said a man expects you to accept "kola" from him for services rendered […] you may cause more trouble by refusing a bribe than by accepting it. Had not a minister of state said [...] that the trouble was not in receiving bribes, but in failing to do the thing for which bribe was given? (80)

The prevalence of corruption in the city is further attested to by one of Obi's kinsmen when he remarks that "Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was

done" (5). However, it may be argued that his wants and desires, perhaps, more than the influence of the city are the causes of the misfortune that befalls him. He admits this much when "he reminded himself that England had been as corrupt not so very long ago" (40). Obi makes no pretence about his desperate need for a white collar job not only to 'serve' but also to give meaning to his newly acquired education and even to be able to repay his supposed scholarship. He needs a 'comfortable salary' because with his education, Obi is now a member of the exclusive club of "the elite whose small talk at cocktail parties was: 'How's the car behaving?'" (85).

It is clear, therefore, that before Obi's exposure to the vagaries of the city, his inherent human failings are already lurking in the background and waiting for the opportunity to strike. It is not stated in the novel that Obi acquires his membership of the elite club on account of his having come to live in the city. It appears to be on the strength of his educational attainment. Joseph, his 'countryman,' who has been in the city for a longer period than Obi is not a member of this club. Even the president and secretary of their town union who may be regarded as members of the elite class by virtue of their ability to speak English and who have lived in the city for many years are not members of the club. If Obi feels pressured by the negative values of an imaginary club, the city alone can hardly be blamed for the unpleasant consequences of such an arrangement. This line of thought seems to be in agreement with Ernest Emenyonu's (1978) commentary on Jagua Nana. Emenyonu observes that:

> It is possible to argue that nothing can corrupt a person unless he wants to be corrupted or there is some weakness or flaw in his character that allows him to become corrupt. In *Jagua Nana*, for instance, it was not only the city which corrupts Jagua... (*The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, 1978, 99 – 100).

City dwellers' reluctance or outright refusal to leave the city even when it fails to meet their expectation is one of the concerns that run through Ekwensi's city novels. Beatrice the First in *People of the City* refuses to heed the advice that she should go back home to at least treat herself of a life-threatening ailment. "That woman, one day she will die. When them tell her go home, she no go. One day she go die for this city" (33). She eventually dies in the city consequent upon her refusal to leave. Also, Sango is aware of his apparent lack of progress in the city. "He was thinking generally of himself in the big city. What had he achieved? Where was he going? Was he drifting like the others?" (p.46) He is aware that he is drifting just like everyone else in the city; yet, he refuses to leave the city even after losing everything he owns – his home, his job, even his dignity. Except for his

meeting and marriage to Beatrice the Second, Sango has nothing to show for his living in the city.

The reluctance to leave the city even in the face of apparent failure sometimes leads city dwellers to joining secret societies which is another concern of Ekwensi. Rather than admit failure and quit, city dwellers often prefer to develop coping strategies one of which is to join secret societies. While some of those who join obey the rules and 'prospered,' like Sango's father-in-law, others who do not have the courage to pay the price end up committing suicide. High crime rate is one of the problems in the city that worry Ekwensi in *People of the City*. It is not a coincidence that the major character in the novel, Amusa Sango, is a crime reporter. It is also significant that Sango owes his popularity on the job to the frequency of his reports in the newspaper which is due to the fact that there is always one crime or the other to report on. The city is never in want of crime news. A corollary to the above is what seems to be the author's concern that crimes are never resolved in the city.

> Sango did not often sit at his typewriter with satisfaction. As a crime reporter, he had seen the beginning of many crimes that made the headlines but never the end (20).

A major problem plaguing the city which is also a preoccupation of Ekwensi is the lack of proper planning of the city. The failure to plan the city brings chaos and disorder in the world of *People of the City*. It aids the commission of crime, obstructs the normal functioning of things and prevents city dwellers from achieving their goals. As a crime reporter, Sango often finds himself unable to respond as promptly as required to crime situations. On one of such occasions, when his movement is hampered by what he perceives as improper planning of the city, he blurts out his frustration:

> Someday the city would learn to build rail and road crossings on different plans as they did in sensible cities (18).

Another issue that worries Ekwensi in the novel is system failure in the city. Nothing seems to work in the city. Reformatory homes do not reform its inmates. Instead, the inmates are hardened. Sango is shocked at Aina's metamorphosis after she completes her jail sentence because "where previously Aina might have stalked or hesitated or used a tactful word, she now spoke bluntly" (69).

The problem of overcrowding and inadequate housing for the city inhabitants is one of the issues raised in the novel. After Sango's ejection by his shylock landlord, he combs the

streets of the city in search of an alternative accommodation without success and remains a squatter till the end of the novel. Both Ekwensi and Achebe demonstrate common concerns about problems commonly associated with the city such as filth, over-crowding, crime and the menace of street urchins., bribery and corruption, forgery, sexual immorality, environmental degradation, high crime rate, youth unemployment and class stratification which is very apparent in the city resulting in the designation of certain areas as reserved areas while some are tagged as slums. Ekwensi especially presents the city as a chaotic place and at bursting point with several irresolvable problems. These problems range from unemployment to overcrowding, homelessness, thuggery, alcoholism, high living, night life, threat to the marriage institution, religious hypocrisy, susceptibility to ritual killing and sexual immorality among others. Dwellers are attracted by the glamour of the city, the promises and hope it dangles before its potential victims who see the city as the Eldorado of opportunities and as a place for limitless enjoyment. Consider Filia's reason for wanting to relocate to the city in *Iska*:

> I want to be famous […] I want to appear on the stage, newspaper, on television […] And when I marry, it must be a man who is known, a man with something […]. Lagos is the place (71).

Similarly, one of Achebe's characters in *No Longer at Ease*, Nanga, is convinced that Odili's youthfulness and education can be put to better use in the city where opportunities are believed to be in abundance. Nanga sees the city as a place of opportunity where people, especially the youth, can actualise their dreams. He tells Odili with conviction that "I think you are wasting your talent here, I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service" (13). Instructively, Odili's secret plan in agreeing to visit the city is to pursue enjoyment; needless to say that for him, the city is a place of pleasure and lust. Also, a member of the minister's entourage seems to affirm Odili's notion of the city when she jokingly cautions him, "I kin see say you na good boy. Make you no agree am spoil you" (20). It turns out that not only Odili's exposure to women in the city succeeds in 'spoiling' him, his discovery of other opportunities, which are hitherto unknown to him, combine to effect a radical change in him.

Rampant sexual permissiveness in Lagos and the tendency for the city to inculcate negative moral values in the youth, particularly young girls also form part of the concerns of Achebe in *No Longer at Ease*. Elsie and Bisi are mere teenagers in the novel, yet the profundity of their sexual experience is worrisome. Sexual immorality also comes to the fore in *A Man of the People* as one of the defining characteristics of Lagos. Nanga, a

married man, has no problems sleeping with Agnes, a married woman and lawyer at twenty-five pounds a time. Events in the novel show that Nanga has a string of women he takes to bed at will including an American woman, Jean, who is not only married but whose infidelity is not limited to Nanga. She sleeps with any man she finds available including a total stranger and low class Odili. Sexual immorality and lack of self-control drives Nanga to Elsie, his ex-student's girlfriend on the flimsy excuse that Odili earlier told him of how Elsie was only "a good-time girl." The founder of Odili's political party, Max, summarises the frivolous preoccupations of people living in the city when he tells his friend that "women, cars, landed property, that's all they care for (87).

The tendency for city dwellers to lose their parental and cultural values as a result of their contact with the city worries both Ekwensi and Achebe. Both writers express strong aversion to a new urban value which negates the values of the village setting. The authors seem to suggest that there is a peculiar element in the city that makes city dwellers jettison whatever values or virtues that must have accompanied them to the city. This breakaway from old tradition syndrome is so potent and unshakable that no matter the resistance put up by the city dwellers, they soon find that they can no longer maintain the earlier values. This inability to carry on with earlier values may arise from ignorance of the ways of the city or it may come by way of preference for the ways of the city but it arises mostly through pressures exerted on the city dwellers by the city and its strange ways. In *People of the City*, Aina elicits the reader's sympathy as she struggles against a city she does not quite understand. Before she yields to the city's influence to become a temptress and an extortionist, Aina has once been an embodiment of decency:

> Aina had come to the city and was attracted by the men, yet very suspicious of them. Not even the festive throbbing of the drums could break the restraint, which her mother and the countryside had instilled in her (5).

However, she is unable to carry on being a disciplined young woman after coming in contact with Sango who is already experienced in the city's ways. Indeed, Sango sets Aina on the path of ignominy and humiliation that is to later characterise her life in the novel. Sango is the first man in her life who not only introduces her to sex but who also initiates her into the fast pace of city life which she thereafter perfects to her peril.

> But Sango was the city man. Fast with women, slick with his fairy-tales, dexterous with eyes and fingers and when they had parted Sango had known the intensity of her passion (5).

Instructively, her mother, who encourages her to make money through illicit sex in the city, is the same woman who has raised her decently in the countryside before mother and daughter relocate to the city. The pressure of the city is also the reason why Filia Enu in *Iska* who arrives in the city an innocent girl and is described as 'provincial' by her city friend, Remi, soon jettisons her earlier values only to put on the garment of a typical city girl:

> She smoked fifteen cigarettes and drank half a bottle of brandy. She thought if it is going to be a life of madness, I might just as well be fortified. I am in it now (110).

City life appears to be all about vain living to Ekwensi. Unable to understand the undesirable changes in the life of her daughter as a result of her moving to Lagos, Filia's mother takes her lamentation to Gadson hoping that he can help save her daughter from impending self-destruction.

> […] the company she is keeping now […] is not the right kind of company […] All the time it is music, speed, late nights, clubs, smokes, drink [...] I don't know what has become of my daughter since she came to Lagos (125).

Filia also admits that her sojourn in the city is bound to bring her nothing but calamity. Although, she arrives in the city bubbling with excitement and great expectation, she discovers how difficult it may be for her to realise her dream just a day after her arrival through a discussion between two young girls of her age about how a man has demanded for sex in exchange for the favour of a job. Oftentimes, she reminisces about the ideals of the past and the happier life she has once led. She sometimes compares the chaotic and unfulfilling life of Lagos with the calm that attended her life in Kaduna. At such times, she seems to consider her decision to move to the city a regrettable one.

> What a very different place was Lagos to St. Monica's with Nida Kaybi, Dan Kaybi and her parents. Here it seemed essential that men and women must continue to plunge headlong into disaster (125).

Similarly, some of Achebe's characters express dissatisfaction with the way the city impacts negative values on its residents. In *No Longer at Ease*, following the discovery that the hero's intended wife, Clara, is an Osu, Obi's kinsmen in Umuofia Progressive Union are astonished that their kinsman could contemplate the idea of marrying her knowing her ancestry. Hence, they promptly put the blame on the city because, in their

view, only the city can influence a man to the point of making him forget his history in a hurry or become insensitive to it. The president of the union intones:

> I have lived in this Lagos for fifteen years […]. Lagos is a bad place for a young man […]. I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry and even thinking of marrying her […] (75).

Obi's kinsmen are unwilling to consider the possibility that Obi and Clara may have met and fallen in love thousands of kilometres away from Lagos let alone accept that Lagos has played absolutely no role in their meeting and the love relationship between them. Also, Obi is unable to attend his mother's funeral having by then found himself in serious financial problems. He reasons that it is far more useful to send the little money on him to his father to enable him to conduct the funeral rites rather than spend it on transportation. This is, perhaps, the reasoning of the elite. However, it constitutes an almost unpardonable offence within the context of the traditional African milieu for it demonstrates Obi's lack of respect for the memory of his late mother. This misdemeanour reduces him to the level of a 'beast' in the judgment of his people; and again, the city takes the blame:

> That is what Lagos can do to a young man. He runs after sweet things, dances breast to breast with women and forgets his home and his people (145).

Again, the true position runs contrary to the arbitrary conclusion and judgment of the Umuofia people as events in the novel reveal that the city exerts very little influence on the personality and attitude of the protagonist. To his credit, he neither runs after the 'sweet things' of the city nor gets unduly distracted from his set ambition. Indeed, his relationship with Clara, while it lasts, keeps him away from other women of the city. He is also not into other frivolities in the city. It is worthy of note however that although Achebe disapproves of the new urban culture which he seems to believe owes its origin to colonialism, he recognises and always exposes the inherent weakness and failures of the individual as well as other extraneous factors militating against the well-being of his protagonists. Achebe intervenes in *No Longer at Ease* to acknowledge and provide further insight into the nature and magnitude of factors other than the city's negative influence as causes of the protagonist's problems:

> The chief result of the crisis in Obi's life was that it made him examine critically for the first time the mainspring of his actions. And in doing so he uncovered…that…this matter of twenty pounds

> every month to his town union…in the final analysis was the root cause of all his troubles (141).

He shows in the above passage how Obi suffers intense pressure from the insensitivity and collective failure of his town people living in the city. As a senior civil servant, he earns forty-seven pounds a month out of which he is under obligation to pay a whopping twenty pounds to his town union as instalment repayment of the 'scholarship' he got from them to study abroad. He is also to send ten pounds to his parents leaving him with only seventeen pounds which he finds grossly inadequate to run his personal affairs in the city.

Achebe's handling of the conflict between the old and new values as represented by the village and the city respectively is significantly different from Ekwensi's approach. For example, the new values that cause conflict between the protagonist and his kinsmen in *No Longer at Ease* can be argued to have arisen more as a result of Obi's education than the city's value. Obi's growth to adulthood and the economic independence his employment, though in the city, gives him, may have reconditioned his thinking to the effect that he no longer needs to be tied to the proverbial apron strings of his parents just as he does not require the interference of his town union in the way he runs his affairs, especially those he considers very private. His father, who regards the city as "a strange land" (119) prefers that his son moves close to his kinsmen. An imminent conflict brews between him and members of his town union who want to use the opportunity of his closeness to them to advance their own selfish motives. The significant role of the city is the freedom it offers Obi to break away from unwarranted interferences. The largeness of the city, its anonymity and the liberty it gives its inhabitants also provide him with the courage to plan and execute his decision to lead a decidedly individualistic life.

Achebe however seems to raise questions as to the wisdom or otherwise of standing aloof in the city in view of the calamity that befalls his protagonist. In other words, could he have prevented himself from being jailed if he had continued to allow his kinsmen in the city to mentor and protect him? After all, as much as he wishes he could stand up to his father in the village to denounce his religion, he never summons up enough courage to do so throughout the novel undoubtedly because of his realisation that the village air does not condone insolence and open disrespect for the elders.

Ekwensi appears to be more hopeful about the possibility of making the city work than Achebe as evident in the way the former highlights some positive possibilities in city life. In *People of the City,* Sango's experience when Aina is caught with a stolen apparel and is

about to be lynched by the city mob is a case in point. Although a policeman in the vicinity watches unconcerned and refuses to voluntarily intervene in the situation, when Sango specifically pleads for his intervention, Sango is both amazed and thrilled that within minutes of the policeman's contact with a police station, a police van arrives at the scene and prevents what could have been a calamity. This is in sharp contrast with Achebe's protagonist in *No Longer at Ease* whose contact with the police in one instance reveals the bribery-taking potential of its men and at another causes him so much irritation that leaves him with the conclusion that the entire "Nigerian police are very cheeky" (67). It may not be wrong to conclude, therefore, that Ekwensi sees hope in the city in spite of many failures.

Similarly, Ekwensi shows that notwithstanding the selfishness and unhealthy rivalry that characterise relationships in the city, city people are capable of, and do sincerely rally round one another in times of distress and agony. The impressive conduct of Lajide's neighbours, friends and well wishers during the sickness and eventual death of one of his wives in *People of the City* is incredible. Even Sango, whom Lajide earlier ejected from his house, does not allow his bitter experience to becloud his sense of sympathy and comradeship. The situation is the same when the city's acclaimed nationalist and great politician, De Pereira, passes away. "All about them, people were weeping with genuine grief and Sango was seeing a new city – something with a feeling" (87-88).

Ekwensi similarly brings the positive aspect of the city to the limelight in *Iska* by showing that although the city may be a symbol of ugliness, chaos, desperation and destruction, it may be wrong to conclude that vanity and chaos are the only defining characteristics of the city. The same city that breeds the likes of Rayimi, the political thug and drug user also accommodates a responsible resident like Mrs. Jolomi, who is a respectable inhabitant of the city and who is not only happily married but also engages in an honest business within the city. Mrs. Jolomi uses her position of influence and wealth to assist a struggling young girl like Filia whose life witnesses a positive turn around on account of her association with the older woman. It is also in the chaotic city that Filia meets Dapo Ladele, a young journalist with a promising future. Although Dapo gets momentarily enmeshed in the greed and desperation that dominate the lives of the people of the city making him sacrifice his professional ethics at the altar of making more money, he realises his mistakes, regrets his action and does so while still in the city. Filia's association with Dapo Ladele comes

across to the reader as a blessing not only to her but also to her family. Remi, Filia's friend, who takes it upon herself to give Filia tutorials on coping with life in Lagos using men, changes her ways and abandons a life of waywardness at the end of the novel. She even gets married. Besides, Remi, Dapo and Mrs. Jolomi all play prominent roles in assisting Filia's mother to cope with the shock of the sudden death of her daughter; yet, they all reside in the callous and indifferent city. Dapo's attitude is particularly commendable as he immediately assumes the role of a dutiful son-in-law offering to drive Filia's mother all the way from Lagos to the Eastern part of the country.

One outstanding characteristic of Ekwensi's writing about the city that sets him apart from Achebe and makes his city books uniquely and distinctively 'Ekwensiesque' is his portrayal of the city as 'a must-come-to' (irresistible) place, even in spite of its ugliness. As observed by Obiechina (1975), Ekwensi writes "with a profound knowledge of someone who truly knows the city," as evidenced by his description of the physical environment of Lagos which is vivid and real as captured in this passage:

> [...] the constant noise of traffic, the honking of cars, the loud-speakers blaring out "high life" tunes from record shops [...] the hawkers crying their wares [...] the crowds massing wherever there is an incident [...] the crowded slums side by side with ultra-modern office blocks [...] the radiant street lamps, the desperate gaiety of night-club life [...] (*Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, 149).

Obiechina observes further that Ekwensi vividly "captures the physical and social environment of Lagos in his fiction; he relates his characters to the environment successfully and demonstrates with conviction, how the environment provides the opportunity for people from different parts of the country to throng the city either in search of freedom, or in pursuit of the limitless opportunities which they perceive exist in the city" (150). His writing also seems to posit that although the city is "an arena of corruption, crime and violence," it is nevertheless "an escape from the prospect of a poorer life" in the village (Emenyonu, 1978, 150). In *Iska*, the heroine emphatically states her reason for desiring to relocate to Lagos from Kaduna. In her reckoning, Kaduna holds a very little promise and hope for a prosperous living because she believes its inhabitants can only drift and sink into oblivion. Hence, she declares: "I cannot stay in the North...I'm too young to remain there doing nothing" (70). For Ekwensi, living in the village may be worse than living in the city not just because people who live in the village tend to be poorer than those in the city, but also because there seems to be greater threat to life in the countryside

as illustrated through the story of the life and death of the heroine's father, Uzodike Enu, which the heroine's mother recounts to her daughter. First, he describes its landscape in splendid terms but goes on to enumerate its main features and characteristics:

> Ogabu was green, another world, so very different from Kaduna, Filia could hardly believe she was still in Nigeria. Where Jos was wide open with mountains for a horizon and cactus for fencing and cattlemen grazing their herds, Ogabu was cool with a smell of humus and a damp crunch of fallen leaves under the feet (49).

These are attractive and commendable features of the village but the author reveals further that Ogabu is also the place of family feud, envy, treachery and jealousy. It is "the village of land hunger where […] always there was some land dispute in progress" (50). The village is depicted as a place where the 'spirit' of the dead comes to haunt the living and does not spare even the children. Ogabu village is a place where people refuse to accord a decent burial to their kinsman because he fails to pay age group dues before his death. Then, Ekwensi uses the story of Filia Enu's father, Uzodike Enu, particularly the major part of his life which he spends in the village and his death which his wife says defies her understanding to show what living in the village may portend for villagers.

According to her narration, Uzodike had a deep and unbiased assessment of the village and its people and concluded that it was not a safe place. This understanding informed his decision not to live in the village but rather sojourn in Jos where he spent many years. Uzodike often said that he would return to the village only when he was ready to get killed (56). This was in realisation of the dangers inherent in the village. However, constant ethnic clashes in the north particularly one in which he lost his two sons to a riot as well as the fact that he was regarded in Jos as a stranger and remained unaccepted by the people eventually compelled him to return to Ogabu. Consequent upon his understanding of the village as an unsafe place, Uzodike took the precaution of returning to his birthplace with a foreigner to safeguard his life. He took with him a Hausa mallam whom he believed could protect him from evil men (55). This measure however proved inadequate because Filia's mother recalls that:

> It was since we came back from Jos that I began to know about witchcraft. Sometimes when I sleep it seems to me that some heavy stone had been rolled over my body and is choking me (56).

Thus, while Uzodike was happy that he had at last re-united with his roots and people, some of whom he believed were also happy with his home coming, life in the village soon

proved to be even more challenging than he had anticipated and he eventually lost his life in the struggle that ensued impliedly between him and his half brother over a parcel of land. From this account of the life and death of Uzodike, therefore, Ekwensi's position regarding living in the village is clear and unambiguous. He does not seem to venerate the village nor does he imply that his characters' lives may be better, if they do not sojourn in the city. Another significant approach Ekwensi uses in treating the city, which is different from Achebe's method, is the way he allows the mixing together of different people in the city to strip his characters of tribal or ethnic loyalty. At the beginning of *Jagua Nana*, Ekwensi reveals that Jagua and her boyfriend, Freddie Namme belong to the same ethnic group and speak the same language. Significantly however, both of them avoid communicating with each other in their native tongue even when Jagua only manages to speak Pidgin English.

> Like Freddie, she was an Ibo from Eastern Nigeria but when she spoke to him she always used pidgin English, because living in Lagos city, they did not want too many embarrassing reminders of clan or custom (5).

In line with the author's intention, tribal or ethnic affinity does not play any role in their relationship or dealings with each other. Decisions to love or hate each other are taken without recourse to their common ethnic background. It is instructive also that before the novel ends, Jagua pitches her tent with Chief Taiwo, a Yoruba man, vowing also to fight Freddie Namme with all her might – "I goin' to fight you till I die. Me an' Uncle Taiwo" (136), she tells Freddie pointedly. She also carries out her threat by helping Taiwo in his campaigns and throwing jibes at Freddie. It is instructive that Jagua's effort at getting Freddie to the hospital when he is attacked and the condolence visit she pays to the family are not done on account of ethnic kinship but on the strength of the old romantic relationship that once existed between them.

Ekwensi goes ahead to demonstrate the capacity of the city to neutralise ethnic consideration when, in the novel, Freddie marries a Sierra Leonean girl maintaining that all African people are the same regardless of what part of Africa they hail from. Similarly in *Iska*, the heroine finds genuine love and affection with a man from another ethnic group. Thus, Ekwensi seems to be saying that living in the city has the tendency to make people shed their sense of 'originality' and're-create' themselves to assume new dispositions and idiosyncrasies that keep them in tune with the demands of the city. This is in sharp contrast to Achebe's approach who does not seem to believe that the city can affect its inhabitants

to such an extent that they will forget their ethnicity or act in ways that run contrary to established village customs. To do that merely on the excuse of living in the city, in Achebe's view, is to invite calamity on the city dweller just as the severance of relations between Obi and his town union ultimately leads to his destruction in *No Longer at Ease*, Apparently acting in concert with Achebe's belief, Obi insists that he finds it impossible to fall in love until he meets an Igbo woman. In his revelation of his escapades with women while in England, he concludes that all the relationships he was involved in lacked depth including the one with a Nigerian impliedly because the women are not Igbo. According to him, before he meets Clara,

> […] he had been quite intimate with […] a Nigerian, a West Indian, English girls, and so on. But these intimacies […] were neither deep nor sincere. There was always a part of him […] which seemed to stand outside it all […] (63).

Also while in England, he reveals that "nothing gave him greater pleasure than to find another Ibo-speaking student in a London bus" (45). Back home in Nigeria and in Lagos, Obi limits his interaction to the Igbo only. The most curious of what seems to be Achebe's submission that the city is not capable of making its inhabitant lose their sense of ethnicity is shown in how almost everybody Obi encounters in the city are of the Igbo extraction. The first man who attempts to bribe him is Igbo and so is the policeman who tries to molest him and Clara. Even more interesting is the account of the incident which he narrates to Christopher to the effect that the policeman immediately drops his combative posture when he realises that Obi and his girlfriend are Igbo. Also of significance is his response to an enquiry about African names while he is in London. According to him, a white man asks him if it is true that "all African names mean something" and he replies, "[…] I don't know about African names – Ibo names, yes" (23). Obi's friends in the novel, Christopher and Joseph, are Igbo and members of the Umuofia Progressive Union. They are not seen in their homes or elsewhere interacting with non-Igbo city dwellers throughout the novel. At their meetings, and regardless of the fact that these meetings take place in the city, they hold tenaciously to their ethnic loyalty insisting that they are "strangers" in the city and that they wish to partake only in the good things of the city "but if bad comes let it go to the owners..." (5-6). In spite of Obi's education and exposure and notwithstanding the fact that he lives in the city, he remains strongly committed to and greatly influenced by the dictates of his tribe.

What seems to be Achebe's conviction that the city is not capable of re-moulding its inhabitants to the extent that they will 'forget home' is perhaps the reason he nearly always assigns a benevolent protector for his protagonists in the city. In each of the two novels being studied in this work, Achebe dutifully assigns a father figure – the Umuofia Progressive Union in *No Longer at Ease* and Chief M.A. Nanga in *A Man of the People* – whose role in each of the novels appears to be to ensure that the protagonist is not without a guide, a protector and an overseer in the city.

The significance of Achebe's insistence on assigning a mentor to his protagonists in the city is noteworthy in view of Toni Morrison's argument regarding the subject. Toni Morrison (1981) argues that the reason black American writers often prefer the countryside to the city is because the benevolent, advising black ancestor is believed to exist in the village but not in the city. Through the presence of the Umuofia Progressive Union and Chief M.A. Nanga who serve as mentors to the protagonists in the respective novels, Achebe demonstrates that it is possible to have an advising black ancestor in the city, only that the city advisor may advise and guide in a way that will serve his own parochial interest rather than the interest of the subject. The Umuofia Progressive Union appears to want Obi to be under their control so that he will find jobs for the jobless members of the union having failed in their bid to make him study law so as to take charge of their land matters. Even their desire to have him dress in an impressive manner seems to be aimed at taking the glory for having Obi as their own creation so that they can boast of their achievement to their neighbours. Similarly Chief Nanga invites Odili to the city where he plans to assist him because it gives the older man immense satisfaction and a sense of great achievement to mentor his ex-student but only as long as Odili will moderate his ambition and will not tread where Nanga reigns.

Ekwensi's treatment of the city also takes a significant departure from Achebe's approach in the way that Ekwensi's protagonists are nearly always slum dwellers. They are usually confident, bold and without a feeling of inadequacy or inferiority about their low status in the city. Even in *People of the City* where the hero, Amusa Sango, is educated enough to be a journalist, he resides in the slummy part of the city and at no time does he view his place of habitation as being demeaning or unworthy of his social standing. When his landlord ejects him, he packs his belongings to the railway station and moves in with one of his band boys, First Trumpet, in an apartment that is far worse than his own. Filia Enu in *Iska* shares a room with her whoring friend, Remi, in a slum before she rents an apartment

of her own in another slum and if Filia experiences a psychological problem in the novel, it has nothing to do with her place of abode because the author portrays her as a fulfilled and accomplished young girl as soon as she achieves a level of self sufficiency that enables her to pay for her own accommodation. She becomes confident and self-assured enough that she sends for her mother hitherto residing in the countryside to come and live with her in the city.

As for Jagua, in *Jagua Nana*, she can be rightly described as the Queen of Slums. Being an experienced and confident prostitute, Jagua lives in a single room in a slum and takes great pride and delight in entertaining and attending to the sexual needs of her numerous clients in the room which is usually paid for and furnished by a client. When eventually, her politician lover, Uncle Taiwo, is killed by his party and Jagua's property are seized, she shares a room with a younger prostitute, Rosa, who also lives in a single room in Ajegunle, an obviously more slummy neighbourhood than Jagua's. Jagua lives 'happily' with Rosa and the place soon becomes to her just like her former accommodation to which she freely takes her clients for sexual entertainment. Although she finds herself reminiscing over her past life while in this environment, it is the death of her father rather than the abject condition of her living that finally takes her away from the city to her country home. It is therefore uniquely Ekwensi that his novels focus more on the slums of the city and his characters are created to suit the slums.

This approach contrasts with Achebe's style of restricting his major characters to their motives for coming to the city. In other words, the major characters and indeed all the other characters are hardly allowed to operate beyond the confines of 'official matters' that occasion their sojourn in the city. They usually interact only with people they have known prior to their coming to the city and those they 'must' interact with. There is usually no spontaneous development of relationships among 'strangers' and his characters have no real connection with the city. The effect is that the protagonists are often superficial, peripheral and vague in their interactions both with people and the environment of the city. More often than not, the subjects do not hold a holistic view of the city. Obi's entire interaction in *No Longer At Ease* does not go beyond the activities in his office, with members of his town union who are seen only at their meetings and with his girlfriend and two ethnic friends. He does not relate with his neighbours, does not even know them. Similarly, Odili in *A Man of the People* is strictly confined to political activities which are to serve as his own means of having access to the 'national cake.' His remark that opulence

exists side by side squalor in Lagos is made during a casual walk by an obviously mentally detached man who neither speaks nor is spoken to by anyone throughout the walk.

This anomaly is probably what Achebe attempts to correct in *Anthills of the Savannah* where Buraimoh, the taxi driver and a thorough-bred city dweller, takes the reader through the rigours of life in Lagos. The reader sees Buraimoh in his home, is able to identify with his wife, his five children and sympathise with them seeing how the family struggles to make ends meet in a one-room apartment that is not only mosquito-infested, but also does not have a window that can permit the family access to ventilation. Also in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the reader is able to empathise with Elewa, the illiterate girlfriend of the highly educated Editor of the *National Gazette*, Nkem Osodi. Through Elewa's daily journey from her mother's place to her boyfriend's, the reader again sees the streets of Lagos, the city's chaotic transportation system and gains significant insight into the minds of the city people making them real, believable and easily identifiable.

The tendency by Ekwensi to celebrate his characters and proffer explanations for their wrongdoing in the city can also be contrasted with that of Chinua Achebe's position that does not idealise his characters. Ekwensi justifies Sango's mistakes in *People of the City* on his desire "to forge ahead" in the city. His presentation of Jagua Nana in magnificent terms is even more interesting. Notwithstanding the shortcoming of her being a prostitute, Ekwensi presents Jagua as a woman of many parts who is curiously likeable. She is kind, accommodating, generous, motherly and selfless with an incredible capacity for penitence. Although, Jagua can arouse the anger of the reader, she is capable of eliciting sympathy and admiration at the same time. One of the most admirable attributes of Jagua is that she is plain and unpretentious about her person, her desires and even her warped ambition. She reportedly regards the village boys who earlier seek her hand in marriage as unsuitable and unabashedly declares her preference for "a man of means" as a husband. Ekwensi succeeds in making the reader empathise with her when he reveals that his heroine is not averse to marriage or family life and that, like most women, Jagua initially wishes for her marriage to work. "God knows, she wanted to settle down and become the good wife. But...what grieved her most was that no child came" (167).

As a prostitute and in the large city of Lagos, Jagua's innate goodness still manifests. The novel is replete with accounts of how she 'mothers' her numerous clients, a situation that always gets them hooked to her in spite of her inadequacies. Her success in handling men

and the power she seems to wield over them does not appear to derive merely from her sexual skill but also from other positive qualities she possesses such as maturity, strong personality and an indescribable strength of character; a certain aura that radiates warmth, friendliness and acceptance by all that encounter her. Jagua is thoroughly magnificent! Ekwensi's view of city life and of inhabitants of the city tends to agree with the postmodernist intervention in the way we look at the city in the sense that he seems to be positing that even the vices of the city, one of which is prostitution or sexual permissiveness which Jagua represents and depicts, may possess an inherent positive quality if viewed without a pre-determined rigid theory or principle.

Ekwensi seems to support the postmodernist submission of plurality of opinion in our assessment of what constitutes good or bad morals and what is negative or positive in the behaviour of inhabitants of the city. A look at Jagua's interaction with her fellow city dwellers beginning with her relationship with Freddie Namme may help illuminate this perspective. In spite of her desire to 'capture' Freddie for life and make him marry her, also not losing sight of the risk of losing him to younger women should she allow him to travel to England for further studies, Jagua nevertheless subordinates her ambition to Freddie's obviously more important quest for a brighter future by travelling abroad for higher studies. Hence, Jagua not only consents to Freddie's travel plan, she also takes definite steps to encourage and support him by providing him with financial assistance:

> No worry, Freddie. I goin' to sen' you to England. You be clever boy, and your brain open […].You know what you doin'. You serious with you work […] mus' try pull together to sen' you (8, 26).

Jagua is also a woman with conscience. After Freddie's departure to England, she undertakes a trip to Freddie's country home with the intention of meeting his parents and hopefully securing their approval of her relationship with their son. Unknown to her however, Freddie's younger love interest, Nancy and her mother are already in the village for the same purpose. Jagua suffers a bout of jealousy when she finds that mother and daughter have not only arrived in the village before her, but have in fact, become familiar with the environment. Her humiliation climaxes when, to her consternation, Nancy takes part and excels in the village dance thus boldly announcing her acceptance by her suitor's people. In a desperate and near fatal bid to take revenge on Nancy, Jagua pushes her into the enemy territory while swimming. For a while, it appears Nancy's fate is sealed. Her death seems imminent, given the hostility that exists between the two warring villages.

Another war also seems inevitable which can claim even more casualties. Jagua is aware that she is responsible for the latest misunderstanding and although she is not compelled to atone for her wrongdoing, she nevertheless voluntarily decides to take a bold step to nip in the bud the impending doom even at the risk of losing her own life:

> I beg you not to sen' man-o-war to Krinameh. Or dere goin' to be plenty kill […] is me who cause all dis palaver. So let me go […]. Ah will go dere an' ask chief Ofubara to take me instead of Nancy. I prepare for take de risk (87).

Jagua undertakes the journey to Chief Ofubara's domain and exercises her sexual dominance and influence over him. Chief Ofubara, a man of great stature and eminence, has hitherto been embroiled in a family feud with his cousins for several years over leadership tussle culminating in Ofubara abandoning home and founding another settlement from where he engages his cousins in a relentless war. With Jagua's determination, however, she not only walks the streets of Krinameh unhurt, she also succeeds in bringing peace to the two hitherto feuding parties using sex as a veritable weapon. Chief Ofubara

> […] took her to bed and she gave him herself with an abandon calculated to shock and delight him. The feigned noises practiced over the years, the carefully punctuated sighs and cries of pain, the sudden flexing of thighs and neck […] (95).

By the time Jagua displays her artistry and puts her sexual skills into use, "the wounded lion had been caged" (96). Also, years of animosity and hatred have given way to peace and communal living. Perhaps, most astonishing is that Chief Ofubara, in spite of being aware that Jagua is a prostitute, becomes so enthralled with her and so 'captured,' like most men who have taken Jagua to bed that he promptly gives her money well in excess of what he knows to be the customary bride price and pleads with her to be his wife. As if looking at Jagua from a postmodernist perspective, Ofubara is neither dissuaded nor disgusted by his knowledge of Jagua as a woman of low morals. Also characteristic of Jagua, she shamelessly boasts about her sexual expertise as she calls out to him:

> hol' me tight. I going to teach you,' bout de worl',. I goin' to show you how young man use, to loss his head when 'e sleep Jagwa woman (96).

Symbolically, Jagua's reference to "de worl" in the above passage can be taken as a reference to the city which is the 'world' Jagua knows and where she practises her trade of prostitution. Undoubtedly too, Jagua's reference to a young man is a reference to Freddie

Namme, the man she meets in the city. It can be argued therefore that although Ekwensi regards the city as being permissive especially as regards sexual immorality, a critical examination of this negative tendency may also reveal something positive and useful to humanity particularly those residing in the city as evidenced by the many ways Jagua positively affects the lives of people in the novel, albeit through her sexual prowess. Jagua is also a great counsellor of the youth. When Rosa, a younger prostitute, approaches her for help, having failed to secure accommodation in the city, she does not hesitate to take her in, treating her like her own sister and encouraging her to be steadfast in her relationship with a man who seems to have more than a casual interest in her.

Similarly, Jagua demonstrates compassion and sympathy for Dennis Odoma. She encourages Dennis to be open to her about his life confessing to him that she is not a decent person either. When she realises after Dennis' confession that the young man appears to be set on a far more dangerous path than she has anticipated, she worries herself about him and pleads with him to give up his dangerous lifestyle and turn a new leaf. She urges Dennis to draw inspiration from Freddie who is already studying law in England. She desperately tries to guide him and direct his path. She demonstrates incredible affection towards Dennis like a mother would to her child:

> Stop and go do hones' work, so you kin living and help your modder in her ol' age […] Plenty fine work for Lagos […]. My boy frien' Freddie, is in England. He got no money, but is ambitious […]. He try, try, till God give him luck and he fin' way to go U.K. is in England now (124).

Achebe does not seem to hold a postmodernist, optimistic view of the city or its inhabitants. Rather, he demonstrates a deep understanding of how the environment of Lagos and social forces in the city shape the destiny of his characters but balances these forces with the characters' inherent personal failures thereby stripping them bare before the reader and permitting no celebration of either the city or its inhabitants. He presents his subject in *No Longer At Ease*, Obi, as weak and almost pretentious. Obi is an idealist who believes in the value of education and its potential to move his country forward. He begins with great promise as contained in the address he reads to his town union on his return from England. He speaks glowingly of his fascination for the emerging new Nigeria and his determination to be at the vanguard of the new crop of young Nigerian leaders who will turn things around. However, beyond theorising his ideas and hopes, he seems incapable of initiating a decisive action that can lend credence to his theories. Even the book he

promises to write on the tragedy of the colonialists remains unwritten and not even started throughout the novel. Oftentimes too, the reader finds it difficult to draw a clear line between Obi's idealistic view of the value of education and his own personal interest and motives. He presents a grand theory before his town union on "education for service; not for white-collar jobs or comfortable salaries" (29) when he is aware, inwardly, that he needs a "white-collar job and comfortable salaries" (29) to at least offset his indebtedness to his town union.

This appears to be the kind of grand theory the postmodernist scholar, Jean Francois Lyotard (1979), cautions against. Achebe also exposes his hero's insincerity through a religious issue. The reader is willing to believe him when he expresses reservations about his father's undue dependence on Christianity. He goes on to say that he no longer believes in his father's religion and wonders what could happen if he finds enough courage to tell the old man to his face. "What would happen if I stood up and said to him: 'Father, I no longer believed in your God?'" (51).

When the issue of his intended marriage to an outcast crops up, however, he finds it expedient to proclaim membership of the same religion he savagely criticises and secretly detests. He sensationally but pretentiously declares, "We are Christians. […] Have we not seen the light of the Gospel?" (120-121). Also, Achebe highlights the positive role of the Umuofia Progressive Union in trying to assist Obi find his feet in the city. It is to their credit, for instance, that they shower him with genuine love and support. Throughout the novel, they demonstrate an uncommon admiration and sympathy for Obi where necessary and are always willing to assist whenever the need arises. It is not an exaggeration to state that Obi owes his educational achievement to members of the union who tax themselves to see him through school even if the funds are made available to him merely as a 'loan.' He may not have had the benefit of a higher education, and in England, were it not for the foresight and determination of his people. On his return, they organise a befitting welcome ceremony for him thereby making him feel proud and truly accomplished. They never fail to regularly enquire after his general well-being even if it seems to border on invasion of Obi's privacy sometimes. Their common desire appears to be aimed at guiding Obi in the city. They also always take the pain to explain their every utterance and action in detail.

However, Achebe makes no attempt to hide the inadequacies of the union by showing that their actions are not only sometimes excessive in the approach and manner they seek to

protect their kinsman, but that they are also selfish and parochial in their ways with most of their utterances and actions constituting anti-social behaviours. On the strength of their having been financially responsible for Obi's education in England, they attempt to control and practically own him. Hence, he must find jobs for his less-privileged kinsmen; he must dress in an impressive manner to boost their ego since they regard him as their creation and he must terminate his romance with a girl of "questionable ancestry" all because they will have it no other way. They put enormous pressure on him to a point of irrationality culminating in his accepting bribe in order to make ends meet.

Having exposed the culpability of the union, Achebe again shifts the reader's focus to see how Obi's own personal failures and weakness contribute to his destruction in the city. Having sought and obtained the permission of his town union to defer the commencement of his loan repayment to enable him to attend to pressing financial matters he goes ahead again to cancel the concession in a moment of unwarranted rage and with an obviously exaggerated estimation of his self-worth. Added to this weakness is Obi's extravagant tendency. In spite of his heavy financial burdens, he allows sentiment to becloud his reasoning resulting in the unreasonable decision to spend a huge sum of money on the engagement ring he gives to Clara. "They […] made for the jeweller's shop in Kingsway and bought a twenty-pound ring" (65). For a civil servant on a salary of forth-seven pounds a month, and still hugely indebted to his town union, twenty pounds is undoubtedly too much to spend on an engagement ring. As if that is not bad enough, "they spent the whole afternoon shopping" (66). The reader wonders if situations such as these and especially the negative consequences they bring on Obi's sojourn in the city may not be a validation of Munford's (cited in Reader, 2004, 304) submission on the city that it facilitates the "unhelpful decisions" of its inhabitants; but Achebe seems to be positing that inherent human weaknesses combine with the vagaries of the city to undermine the happiness and general well-being of city dwellers.

Similarly in *A Man of the People,* Achebe exposes the human failures of the protagonist**,** Odili Samalu, almost to the point of rendering him a despicable character. At the beginning of the novel, Odili is an avowed unionist and committed fighter for the rights of the masses. He takes the reader down memory lane to his university days recalling his activism as a member of the students' branch of the People's Organisation Party. Upon graduation, he chooses to take up a "teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city" (19) because he prides himself on being different and autonomous.

Also as a mark of his commitment to pious living, Odili loses his respect for his ex-school teacher whom he once greatly admired because the latter has joined politics and has become corrupt in the city where he is a member of parliament. When Nanga visits the school where Odili teaches and the entire village goes into frenzy, his anger and hatred for the honourable grow in leaps and bounds:

> I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame […] in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slope of 'inflation.' I wish for a […] voice of thunder to hush this ridiculous festival […] (2).

This is Odili's world-view prior to his visit to the city. At this time, he is an idealist who believes in the true emancipation of his people who he is convinced have been short-changed by people like the Honourable Nanga who claim to be representing them in the city. To emphasise his commitment, he tells the story of Nanga's sycophantic performance at the public gallery, which he recalls must have earned him a seat at the parliament. The vividness with which he describes the event, juxtaposing Nanga's ignominious role with perceived unjust humiliation of another government minister whom he believes is on the side of the general populace, wins Odili tremendous admiration in the sight of the reader. He appears both believable and commendable as being absolutely patriotic and incorruptible. However, Achebe begins to unveil Odili's inherent failures through his utterances and attitude upon his arrival in the city.

> […] On that first night there was no room in my mind for criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air […] saw all the beautiful furniture […]. I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister, I would be most anxious to remain one for ever (41-42).

This turns out to be just the beginning of Odili's transformation. As he interacts with his host minister and other people in the city, he begins to desire the things he previously would not care about; or has not even realised are in existence. Before his sojourn in the city for example, he would never have contemplated contesting for his constituency's seat in the parliament; neither would he have dreamed of the possibility of sharing a dinner with foreigners not to mention taking one of them to bed. Before long, Odili, who previously would easily "confess to a certain feeling of awkwardness" before a lawyer's "sophisticated, assured manner," begins to boast of how his closeness to the minister gives everything he says a "heightened significance" (55) during conversations. He now realises he can be like the minister; that he can own a car, have a lot of money and even marry a

wife as beautiful as Edna, the intended second wife of his former schoolteacher. What begins as a revenge mission gradually turns into a genuine desire:

> I was suddenly confronted by a fact I had been dodging […] that I wanted Edna now […] for her own sake first and foremost and only very remotely as part of a general scheme of revenge […]. Now I would gladly chop off Chief Nanga's head so as to get her (121).

Odili also admits to having a "new political ambition;" and all the changes in him have occurred as a result of spending a brief holiday in the city. Does the city therefore engender Odili's new attitude? Would his world-view, value and, most importantly, his estimation of his self-worth and potential remain unchanged if he had not undertaken a trip to the city? In many significant respects, Odili's new attitude and values may have been shaped by his contact with the city especially because, even with a university degree, he does not appear to have had a clear idea or even interest in using his education to amass wealth until he visits the city where he is able to acquire "a brand new Volkswagen, eight hundred pounds in currency notes […] assurances that more would be forthcoming" (113), and a privileged sexual liaison with a white woman. All these and many more, made possible by his coming to the city, make his confidence soar and Odili is unstoppable from then on. Therefore, it is difficult to exonerate the city as a temptress that seduces its visitors with its irresistible attractions – bright lights, architectural wonders, enormous size, cloak of anonymity, seemingly endless opportunities and flashpots. It is little wonder that desperation seems to have suddenly taken over Odili's psyche.

Interestingly however, Achebe reveals through the protagonist that Odili's metamorphosis has more to do with "man's basic nature" (42); the innate susceptibility of humans to corruption, rather than factors in the city that tend to precipitate its inhabitants towards unpredictable behaviour. Like Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer At Ease*, Odili Samalu is innately corrupt and his supposed idealism can survive only until power, money and position are thrust upon him. In other words, Achebe finds ways to make his characters accept responsibilities for their actions and inactions in the city and pays particular attention to individual human failings as veritable factors moulding and shaping behaviour in the city.

One characteristic of Ekwensi's treatment of the city is that he makes women play leading roles in his city books. Two out of the three novels selected for this work, *Jagua Nana* and *Iska* have females as their subjects. Ekwensi does not underestimate women. Through his works, he demonstrates his recognition of the new and obviously more visible role being

gradually but firmly carved out for the African woman especially the African woman living in the city who is cut away from village culture where women are dominated and relegated to the background. In *Jagua Nana* and *Iska*, women take the centre stage dictating the trends and controlling the events in the novels. This seeming celebration of the attributes, power and influence of women in the city is particularly made manifest in *Jagua Nana* where the heroine, Jagua, despite being a prostitute, succeeds in eliciting and sustaining the reader's interest, admiration and even respect throughout the novel. In *People of the City* where the protagonist is male, Ekwensi gives the power to rescue the man from aimlessness in the city to a woman, Beatrice the Second. Prior to Amusa Sango's meeting with Beatrice the Second, the woman who becomes his wife at the end of the novel, he simply drifts along with the others in the city, completely unable to have a firm grip of his life or make meaning out of his sojourn in the city. However, as soon as he meets and establishes a relationship with the woman, his life takes a positive turn becoming meaningful, purposeful and with a clear focus and direction. This is the awesome position Ekwensi creates for women who live in the city.

In *Jagua Nana*, there seems to be a reversal of fortune in the male versus female and city versus village relationship. Ekwensi appears to be positing that while the men can dominate and control the women in the village, in the city, the women dominate, control and make the men do their bidding. Indeed, the helplessness of the male in the hands of the female or the sexual power which the woman wields and with which she brings the man to submission in the city is most poignant in *Jagua Nana*. Throughout the novel, Jagua takes absolute charge of all her relationships and the men she encounters and sleeps with. There is the young and ambitious Freddie Namme, who is nearly half Jagua's age being twenty-five while Jagua is forty-five when their relationship begins. Again, she is uneducated and a common whore whereas, Freddie is a man of learning, a college teacher with a determination to study for a law degree in England. Freddie is also not into nightlife or clubbing; he is handsome, gentle, focused and without interest in womanising. Notwithstanding all these factors that clearly set them apart, Jagua is determined to seduce him and make him her 'regular.' Not only does she succeed in sleeping with Freddie, she also seemingly 'imprisons' him, at least for a considerable length of time, giving him no breathing space and ensuring that poor Freddie sleeps with her only. Worse still, she refuses to quit her trade of prostitution despite Freddie's devotion and loyalty to her. She stubbornly goes on her 'regular beat' and almost turns Freddie into an emotional wreck.

"Freddie felt hopeless. ...why could he not shake Jagua off? She is not a respectable woman, for all her attractiveness. He knew that" (35). Jagua also exerts her dominance over Dennis Odoma, regardless of the fact that he is a dangerous criminal as she succeeds in making him forfeit to her a set of gold trinkets worth hundreds of pounds which he has stolen and has taken to Jagua with intent to exchange for money.

This constitutes a clear departure from Achebe's treatment of women even in a city setting. Clara in *No Longer At Ease* is not significantly different from all other women in his village novels in spite of the fact that Clara is supposed to be a city woman and should be more assertive. Notwithstanding the fact that Clara is a woman of no mean educational achievement having trained as a nurse in England, she remains largely an obscure character throughout the novel even despite her privileged position as the only love interest of the protagonist. Worse still, it appears she is created merely to serve Obi's whims and caprices. Obi is her life and her breath. She lives to please him and make him happy. Hence, when she is not making soup for him, she is warming his bed or generally waiting on him. Finally, when Obi tells her he will not be able to fulfil his promise of marrying her because he cannot disregard the opposition of his family, Clara leaves the city unannounced and to an unknown destination, traumatised, used and dumped. Clara's pregnancy in the novel, which turns out to be an unwanted one and the termination of which leaves her bedridden for five weeks, aptly describes the indignity and pain Achebe's female characters suffer even in the city.

However, by the time he gets to *A Man of the People,* Achebe seems to have realised that in the city, women will necessarily assume a more significant role and that the inner workings of the city is such that does not permit the relegation of women to the background. Hence, Eunice's character in *A Man of the People* is significant in a number of ways. It is Achebe's first real attempt at according value to his women characters; an attempt that becomes emboldened in *Anthills of the Savannah* where Beatrice, a highly educated and intelligent woman, is assigned the task of picking up the pieces of the wasted lives of the male characters. Also significant to the character of Eunice is the way she is martyred as a result of her commitment to the protection of the rights of the common people. Although naïve and obviously inexperienced with her political commitment emanating more from her emotional dedication and loyalty to the leader of her party, Max, with whom she is romantically linked, she however demonstrates an uncommon bravery by avenging the brutal murder of her fiancé:

> Eunice had been missed by a few inches when Max had been felled. She stood like a stone figure […] for some minutes more. Then she opened her handbag as if to take out a handkerchief, took out a pistol instead and fired two bullets into Chief Koko's chest (160).

Eunice's unusual courage may be viewed as Achebe's tacit acknowledgement of the uncommon bravery of women living in the city. He seems to admit that women in the city cannot be the same as women in the village. City women are constantly being moulded and remoulded by the city and they get toughened in the process; unlike their village counterparts.

The old generation writers' attitude to the city can also be studied and understood better by examining the way they make their characters affect the city or be affected by it. Since the city appears to have a character sketch that assumes its capacity to alter the pattern of behaviour of its residents, it is imperative to explore what may be the submissions of the old generation novelists regarding the power of the city to change it's residents' attitude. In other words, who survives better in the city in the reckoning of the older writers? Is it the characters that attempt to and succeed in modifying or changing outright the pattern of behaviour they meet on arrival in the city or the ones that surrender their previous pattern of behaviour to take on the one they meet in the city? How do the old writers create characters that either change or are changed by the city?

Ekwensi concentrates on city life and creates characters that are not only likeable and fascinating but are also very credible. His hero in *People of the City*, Amusa Sango, is a dashing bachelor, young, brilliant, hardworking, determined, kind, compassionate and highly ambitious with a strong personality. Sango comes into the city with a large heart but events in the novel suggest that the author does not conceive of the city as a place where compassion and large heartedness are a virtue. In other words, absurdities seem to constitute the norm in the city. Two instances in the novel reveal Sango's compassionate nature and how it works against his interest and progress in the city. Sango's relationship with and loyalty to Aina does not seem to have been anchored in love or respect for her but on Sango's compassionate nature. He is always willing to be of assistance to her right from the morning after their first encounter when she calls at his place appearing to need help. Sango wants to help her if only she opens up to him. When she puts herself in trouble by stealing and getting arrested, he makes efforts to secure her bail. He also visits her mother and gives her all his life's savings when Aina is in jail at a time when he has serious financial needs of his own, having been recently ejected from his place of residence. After

Aina's release, he goes searching for her to explain to her the efforts he made on her behalf thus providing the girl with another opportunity to put him in fresh trouble for extortion. He refuses to take a drastic measure to discourage Aina's incursion into his life until it almost becomes too late. He allows himself to be pushed literally to the wall by her and would have committed murder but for sheer providence.

Thus, for seemingly lacking the capacity to demonstrate meanness, Sango nearly destroys his own life and would have been condemned to death by hanging as warned by First Trumpet all because he is compassionate. The tragic event resulting from his relationship with Bayo which proves fatal for Bayo is also traceable to Sango's sense of compassion. Bayo acknowledges this much when he praises Sango for his understanding. "That's why I love you. You do not blame me when I make mistakes (67).

It is Sango's eagerness to please a friend that leads him to encourage Bayo to embark on the tragic attempt to see the latter's lover. He wants to be there for his friend in spite of the apparent inconsistencies in Bayo's character and the fact that Sango can hardly make sense of the relationship in question. He tells Bayo with determination. "...If they are taking her away from you, we must make one last effort to see her. We're going there – this night Bayo!" (94).

Although Sango is lucky to have come out of the fatal trip alive losing Bayo and his lover in the process, the report he writes about the murder costs him his means of livelihood thus turning his well-intentioned desire to be a true friend into a catastrophe for Bayo and his own undoing too. In accordance with the purpose of the author therefore, Sango suffers in the city only because he is unwary of its ways. And like most other characters, he would have been utterly destroyed in the city were it not for his meeting with Beatrice the Second and the girl's earlier misfortune of losing her betrothed which creates a vacuum that Sango comes in to fill. What Ekwensi seems to be saying in respect of his hero in this novel is that Sango's large-heartedness and other positive aspects of his character are not capable of changing the city. He does not even seem to understand the city's ways much less being in a position to effect any meaningful change in its idiosyncrasies. Hence, his marriage at the end of the novel serves as a lifeline. It is the chance to begin a new life and instructively with a girl who has not yet been corrupted or influenced by the ways of the city; a girl who has no desire to remain in the city because the city is overcrowded and she is one of the people overcrowding it (89).

Another character in the novel, Beatrice the First, is a beautiful young woman. She is vivacious and enchanting but her sojourn in the city is rooted in negativity. She appears to have everything she needs to make her stay in the city an enjoyable one but she ruins her chances of happiness with greed and avarice. Beatrice the First comes into the city from the eastern part of the country. Like other city dwellers, she has come in search of what she believes the countryside cannot offer her – money and good life. She meets Grunnings, a Whiteman and engineer who has left his family in England to work in the Nigerian city. He marries Beatrice and she has three children by him. Grunnings lives with her in a decent part of the city but rather than live a contented life as a married woman and responsible mother to her children, she believes she is missing out on the fun in the city and decides to 'do something about it' because her marital abode "... is a grave, too quiet and lonely. I like noise; ... And I like high life and drinks and music. I like night life" (31-32). Beatrice the First admits that her desire to leave her husband and desert her marriage is not because her husband does not care about her, but because her only mission in the city is to enjoy life which a life in matrimony deprives her of:

> He's a nice fellow; he loves me very much. But lots of men also love me and I am going to leave Grunnings… When I live on my own, I' ll be happy. I came here to live and enjoy life (31-32).

She perfects her plan, deserts her husband and begins to move from one man to the other contracting strange diseases in the process. In the end, she pays the supreme price with her life, and according to her last lover, Kofi, she is buried as a pauper; no one to claim her. Kofi is bitter; he is unable to understand why she comes to the city insinuating that the city is no good because, in his view, it only destroys its inhabitants. "The city eats many an innocent life like her every year. And it is a waste of our youth! It must stop" (112). If Kofi's submission is taken as representative of Ekwensi's position, it means that Ekwensi blames the city for the misfortune that befalls Beatrice the First. The question may then be asked as to whether the city is the actual cause of her death. Is it not the same city that offers her Grunnings? The man who dotes on her and who, long after she has deserted him, still visits nightclubs not to search for new dates but in the hope and anticipation that he may hear news of her if not see her?

It is in the light of the above argument that it can be argued further that the city may not have been responsible for changing her character in view of her confession that she

wilfully desires to live free and uninhibited. Perhaps, the culpability of the city lies in its provision of the thrills and frills which serve as means of attraction especially to the youth. The city gratifies the desires of the heart – makes available those things that men and women lust after: fame, glamour, money, power, property, sex. Ekwensi appears to be positing through the life and untimely death of Beatrice the First that the city is capable of changing the behaviour of its inhabitants particularly the youth who are easily impressionable and who find many attractive but potentially dangerous avenues for testing their youthful exuberance in the city.

Ekwensi's presentation of Aina in *People of the City* is not quite consistent making it difficult for the reader to ascertain the extent to which she constitutes a negative influence on the city or determine how far the city creates the misery that attends her life in the city. To a large extent, Aina comes across as being intrinsically crafty, greedy and frivolous. Yet, she attracts the reader's sympathy partly because she may have been a victim of poor upbringing and partly because some of the problems of the city such as overcrowding and lack of social amenities may have also contributed to turning her into a seductress. After her conviction and jail sentence consequent upon the theft of clothes, Sango pays her mother a visit and finds her living condition terribly appalling:

> […] the entire floor was covered with sleeping bodies. Everyone slept on the floor, from early childhood Aina has listened to talks about sex, seen bitter quarrels, heard and perhaps seen adults bare their passions shamelessly like animals.... from early childhood she had learnt the facts of life without being taught (27).

It is under this sordid condition that Aina struggles to survive, earn a living without any education or vocation that can qualify her for a decent living. To a large extent therefore, Aina appears to be an unfortunate character, one that is bound to be influenced by the presence of negative factors in the city. She is one of the unlucky inhabitants of the city that cannot change the city for the better; rather, they are changed by the city in very negative ways. Little wonder then that perhaps out of no apparent fault of hers, she is destined to fail in the city and her life is a catalogue of failures. She fails to make Sango love her, fails to eke out a living as a businesswoman and cigarettes seller, fails to secure the promised reduced jail sentence for a rather trivial offence of stealing despite pleading guilty as advised; and in spite of all her 'skills' which include using a funeral ceremony as an avenue for a possible romantic encounter, Aina fails to achieve love. Her final attempt at trapping Sango through an unwanted pregnancy turns out to be her greatest undoing as

she not only loses the pregnancy, but also nearly loses her life in the process; so that at the end of the novel, Aina has nothing but sad miserable tears. "Aina stood there crestfallen. There were genuine tears in her eyes. She had broken down at last (119).

Lajide's character, also in *People of the City,* constitutes a huge threat to the possibility of a positive change in the character of the city because he represents the city in very negative ways. If viewed from the familiar negative image of the city, Lajide comes across as a quintessential city dweller. He is shrewd, arrogant, ruthless, unsympathetic, dishonest, oppressive, greedy, crafty, frivolous and boastful. He harasses his tenants unduly, deprives them of the amenities they have already paid for, issues arbitrary quit notices to them in flagrant breach of the law, and callously offers the same apartment to a reluctant concubine. He revels in boasting especially before a female audience. "Lajide was talking incessantly about his wealth, his influence in the city, and the stupidity of certain tenants" (50).

Lajide's selfishness and insensitivity to the plight of people around him is not limited to his tenants or business associates alone. He shows wickedness even to his own blood brother who is "[...] a farmer who had a limp and rode a bicycle. A bicycle when Lajide changed cars once a year" (117). However, there is an interesting contradiction to Lajide's character which not only shows that there is compassion in the city, but also the probability that the city's character can indeed yield to positivity. For example, Lajide's love and devotion to his third wife, who dies following an attack of a stroke is incredibly impressive. Considering the fact that he has as many as eight wives in his harem and is relentless in his bid to win Beatrice the First's love, it is surprising that Lajide is able to devote attention to his third wife when she is struck by a stroke. Even more amazing is the shock and devastation he suffers as a result of the woman's death and from which he fails to recover culminating in his own death shortly afterwards. It seems therefore that in spite of his excesses, Lajide is a loving, devoted and responsible husband to his wives which by extension, can be taken to mean that notwithstanding the city's perceived excesses, there are humane qualities and attributes in it that make it liveable.

Similarly in the novel, Bayo, an unfortunate young man who comes to the city to make a success of his life like other city dwellers but discovers that achieving his mission in the city may prove more difficult than he has anticipated seeks desperate but risky alternatives

in the city all of which turn out to be costly mistakes. It is difficult to take a position as to whether or not Bayo is one of the characters that attempt to change the city but events in *People of the City* clearly reveal that Bayo's character is significantly altered by his experiences in the city. He makes no attempt to hide his failures and inadequacies. He admits that he loves high life and night life which the city provides. He is also believed to possess a fair understanding of the city and its ways. Sango turns to Bayo for help to facilitate his easy access to Beatrice the First because Sango acknowledges Bayo's superiority as a man about town who is well known to both the city lads and young girls.

To Bayo's credit however, he conducts a mental reassessment of his mission in the city with a view to finding out how well he is faring at the end of which he makes certain decisions about his life and stay in the city, the most important of which is to settle down with a girl of his dreams. This is perhaps to help him refocus in the city. He is however brutally killed shortly after, thus preventing him from realising his goal.

In *Jagua Nana,* Freddie Namme is unable to influence the city in a way that may bring meaningful changes to the ways the city treats its residents. Although unarguably one of the most likeable characters in the novel because he is young, educated, handsome, ambitious, focused, hardworking and determined, Freddie is incapable of effecting positive changes in the city just as he lacks the will to resist its negative influences. Significantly too, there has always been something perceptibly sorrowful and tragic about him. A man with royal blood, yet humble to the extent that he neither boasts nor even mentions his royal ancestry, Freddie is an epitome of gentlemanliness.

Sadly however, underlying Freddie's gentility is a certain weakness; a weakness that makes him susceptible to the vagaries of the city. Although Freddie demonstrates firmness a few times in the novel, especially in the handling of his relationship with Jagua, he admits and often laments about his weakness the climax of which is his tragic submission to the characteristic of the city which pressures its residents to strive to make fast money. The novel presents Freddie initially as a man whose life is well planned and whose path has been neatly cut. As a college teacher, Freddie is an intellectual in the making. He loves academic work, always wanting to attend lectures at the British Council and never enjoying nightlife like most residents of the city. Freddie enjoys staying quietly in his room, alone, studying and planning on how to further his studies in England in order to achieve his ambition of becoming a lawyer. His effort eventually pays off after a long

struggle. He travels to the United Kingdom, studies law, becomes a lawyer, gets married and he and his wife, Nancy, are blessed with two happy children before they return to Lagos. While studying in the United Kingdom however, Freddie "unknowingly was sowing the seed of his own destruction by joining a political party" (151). As soon as he returns to Lagos, he suddenly realises the need for him to make quick money which he also believes only politics can provide for him. Freddie's character is crucial to the examination and evaluation of the image of the city in literature. It reveals that the city is not an abstract category. The city is the people who dwell in it. Human and financial capital build it. Hence, like human beings, the city is a perplexing paradox. The city is what we make of it. Thus, it is a reflection of the duality and complexity of human nature.

There are questions to ponder about and issues to confront regarding Freddie's character, his sojourn in the city and the extent to which the city may be blamed for seemingly helping him to attain the pinnacle of his ambition only to turn around to destroy him. Freddie demonstrates lots of admirable qualities while living in the city as a young man. He is not unmindful of what other desperate city dwellers do in order to actualise their equally desperate ambition but Freddie proves he is different. He chooses to be studious and lead a decidedly simple life. Regrettably however, he suddenly turns to a different person upon his return from the United Kingdom. He begins to act like the regular city dwellers – bringing desperation and obsession into his quest. Can Freddie's earlier aloofness in the city be a mere façade after all? Is it possible that he may have been biding his time, waiting for the right time to join the rat race in the city? Ekwensi warns the reader at the beginning of the novel that Freddie and Jagua are not different from other residents of the city and that like all inhabitants of the city, Jagua and Freddie "... came to make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money" (6).

If Ekwensi's assertion is correct, then Freddie may be nothing but the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. He is perhaps a mere pretender but one who is also smart, smooth, calculative, slippery and mechanical. Events in the novel tend to lend support to the submission that Freddie appears to have known his real goals in the city and that he may also have carefully mapped out strategies for achieving them. Hence, he pretends to be in love with an older and richer woman so as to obtain financial favour and knows when to call it quits with her. The assurances he frequently gives his real love interest and the woman he later marries are instructive:

> No Nancy. I'm not going to marry Jagua… But just now, it won' be de right thing, if I let her know. Ah mus' wait till ah enter de ship firs. Till I land in Englan' Den! I will show my hand (39).

Also, Freddie casts doubt on his reputation as a gentleman when he sets a trap for Jagua at her regular prostitution beat and gives her the beating of her life. He is calculating and smooth. He perfects his desertion of Jagua long before he sets her up so that by the time he carries out his plan, he does it with admirable neatness and finality that leaves the reader wondering if it is the same Freddie, the famed gentleman. Again, Jagua's attempt to dissuade him from joining politics or running for an elective post and his obstinacy all lend credence to the author's position. Jagua's warning to Freddie is that:

> Politics not for you, Freddie. You got education. You got culture. You're a gentleman an proud. Politics be game for dogs. And in dis Lagos, is a rough game (13).

Freddie's response is:

> I wan' money quick - quick; an' politics is de only hope (137).

Freddie's involvement in party politics for the purpose of making fast money only attracts fast and untimely death to him. His life, struggle, success and eventual death in the city are perhaps a revelation of the multi-faceted attributes of the city which can also be taken to mean the mult-faceted attributes of humans. If viewed from this perspective, all human strifes and quests end in the dust! If it be so, then how should we live? This may be the ontological question that the novel obliquely asks. Also, Ekwensi seems to be submitting that although the city may be capable of delivering part of the promises it usually makes to its dwellers; but they need to be mindful that the city may also deliver the unexpected, including death to those who throng it.

Perhaps, some of the questions to worry about include whether or not Freddie's death in the city is preventable as well as if it may have been possible for him to have achieved 'success' in the city without having to pay with his life. Part of our concern may also be to try to discover the point at which a city dweller's ambition becomes excessive and unattainable in the city and whether the city can set a limit as to how far its inhabitants should aspire. Also, we may need to identify those elements in the city that make its residents indulge in overambition and prone to utter destruction and waste. The inability of Jagua to trace Freddie despite her being a woman about town is an attestation to the largeness of the city which is so vast and mysterious that anything can happen in it.

Nancy Oll is an interesting character in *Jagua Nana.* She is young and is expected to be naïve and relatively inexperienced. However, Nancy is unusually brave and courageous for her age. Although of Sierra Leonean descent and born and raised in Lagos, Nancy has character traits, attitude and uncommon boldness that are used by Ekwensi to represent what he appears to perceive as characteristics of 'real products of the city;' that is, those born and raised in the city. Like Azaro, a 'city product' in *The Famished Road* who regularly fills his pockets with stones to throw at elders, who hits, kicks and rushes at his father's contemporary because the latter has "knocked" him "on the head" (*The Famished Road*, 87), Nancy engages Jagua, her mother's age mate and colleague in a physical combat over Freddie Namme's love. Nancy's attitude may also be taken as signalling a warning to parents on the consequences of raising children in the city. Ekwensi seems to be positing that the consequences may be more far-reaching if the child is raised by a single parent, especially someone that appears to be irresponsible and shameless or whose only means of livelihood is prostitution like Nancy's mother. Nancy's mother is presented in the novel as not being a respectable woman. Like Jagua, she keeps a man as a 'stable' lover but maintains her 'regular job' as a prostitute. She also engages in a stiff competition with Jagua to send her young lover to the United Kingdom just as Jagua plans to do for Freddie and she openly engages Jagua in a shameless free for all fight at a night club – the Tropicana, because she has caught Jagua flirting with her Syrian 'customer.' With a mother like her raising the young Nancy and inculcating childhood values into her; it may not be surprising that Nancy proves to be ill-mannered and disrespectful to elders. Although she is still in her teens when she is introduced in the novel, the knowledge and understanding Nancy claims to have about men, seems possible only with the daughter of a whore. She does not mince words in letting Freddie know that she is far more experienced than he assumes she is:

> I fear Freddie All de young men in Lagos dem talk sweet - like you doin' now. Freddie; But when dem get a girl on de bed you never see dem again. And if dem give de gal belly, she mus' carry de belly alone, and dem will run and let her … (19).

Her reaction in bed when Freddie makes love to her also confirms her as a girl who has since been initiated into the erotic world: "Freddie, I die, kill me, Freddie I die... Oh, God" (38). What is not clear is the extent of culpability of the city in the moulding of Nancy's behaviour and general disposition. Does Nancy derive her near whore status, her lack of decorum and penchant for being disrespectful to elders from the city? Or could she have

turned out the way she has done because of the unfortunate circumstance under which she was raised? Again, could mother and daughter have been genuine victims of deprivation and poverty thereby unwittingly propelling them into immorality?

It is worthy of note also that there are aspects of Nancy's character and behaviour that are commendable. She is confident, daring and fearless. Nancy seems to know what she wants and not even Jagua, with all her experience and age advantage, can intimidate or cow her into jettisoning the love of her life – Freddie Namme. If we appraise Nancy from these admirable qualities, it may then be possible to perceive the city as a unique entity that breeds confident and self-assured inhabitants who can hold their own, demand for their fair share of the good things of life and insist on getting them. It is instructive that Nancy is unequivocal in warning Jagua that the older woman has lost out in their contest for Freddie's love. "Ah better tell you now, you wastin' your time about Freddie. He already choose me" (84). Also, after her marriage to Freddie and upon their return to Lagos, she suspects that her husband is straying into Jagua's bed, she courageously challenges the older woman into an open fight even in a public place; and in spite of her being in mourning following the death of her husband, Nancy boldly walks out Jagua from her matrimonial home without a flinch. Nancy is not an ordinary character. She is perhaps one of Ekwensi's representatives of a true city dweller, courageous, determined, assertive and irrepressible.

Filia Enu's character in *Iska* tends to support what seems to be Ekwensi's position that the city invariably changes the character of its immigrants and that the immigrants helplessly succumb and surrender to the changes the city brings upon them without them being able to influence, let alone, change the behaviour of the city. Thus, in *Iska*, Filia Enu, who is also the heroine, comes across as a character with changing attributes and phases. As a young girl of between sixteen and eighteen and prior to her sojourn in Lagos, Filia is an embodiment of innocence and decency. She is quiet, unassuming, promising and moderately ambitious. She is so pure that Dan Kaybi, her husband, discovers her to be a virgin on the night of their honeymoon and she finds her first sexual experience so painful that she has to be treated for bleeding thereafter. This is the author's presentation of Filia as a provincial girl.

As a city girl however, Filia is a different person. It is instructive that she is reluctant initially on her arrival in the city to take on the garment of a typical city dweller: but after a while, especially as she is confronted with challenges she has not anticipated and with

Remi relentlessly prodding her on, Filia becomes a different person entirely. She becomes desperate, impatient, over-ambitious, indecent, vain and shameless. Filia assaults the sensibility of the reader when she shamelessly attempts to seduce Gadson. She also admits to craving for Piska Dabra's sexual advances (147). Perhaps it is a little of the provincial girl still left in her that makes her flee from it just when her wish is about to materialise. Again, it is necessary to examine what appears to be the author's position regarding Filia's unfortunate fate and the culpability of the city in ensuring that it materialises. In this regard therefore, it is possible to argue that Filia's life is deliberately designed by Ekwensi to be a fleeting one and her destiny is already predetermined. The author prepares the mind of the reader for what is to come to his heroine in the novel right from the dedication page where he dedicates the novel to his late sister whose life "flitted past, like wind." Also, the novel takes its title from transience. 'Iska' in Hausa language means 'wind.' It is arguable, therefore, that Filia is merely a victim of circumstance and an unfortunate character designed to struggle against forces that are clearly predetermined. What is perhaps most significant in the analysis of the relationship between Ekwensi's heroine and the city is that she has to sojourn in the city to meet her pre-arranged death.

Thus, Ekwensi seems to be positing that death is on the prowl in the city. The city appears to be, in his opinion, the place where whatever is designed to go wrong is certain to go wrong. It becomes imperative, therefore, to evaluate the role of the city in ensuring that Filia comes to an expected end thereby fulfilling the intention of the author. Would it have been possible, for instance, for Filia to have escaped death or would her death have occurred under a different circumstance if she had not sojourned in the city? How much blame can and should be put on the city in analysing the life and death of Filia Enu? The city appears to be a dangerous haven. It is in the city that the practice of using commercial transportation system to kidnap innocent and unsuspecting citizens for the purpose of ritual killing and sundry other crimes is most rampant. Also, Filia's purpose for going out at the time she falls victim to her attackers (visiting her hairdresser to make her hair), can be said to be frivolous and frivolities are believed to be the major preoccupations of most city dwellers. In the final analysis therefore, the city cannot be said to be blameless. The city seems liable for plunging Filia into disaster and death just as it may be held responsible for altering her behaviour. Filia Enu is undoubtedly one of the characters that are unable to survive in the city probably because it is a difficult place to live in.

Another character worth examining in *Iska* is Piska Dabra. He is perhaps one of the inhabitants of the city that contribute to the city's continuous bad image. He is a religious charlatan; dubious, hypocritical, adulterous and highly controversial. He owns a self-serving religious organisation in the city and commands a wide followership of gullible city dwellers most of whom appear equally selfish and pretentious in their search for salvation. The dubiousness in the character of Piska Dabra finds perfect illustration in the jaundiced and thoroughly confused account of his life, activities, source of power and even his eventual demise. The author presents him as being quick-witted, clever and able to convert adversities into great opportunities especially in a place like the city which appears to be receptive to manipulations. According to the author's rendition of his profile, Piska Dabra is a man of little education not having gone beyond the primary school level. He gets a job as a teacher and later as a salesman (not in Lagos), but a serious health problem threatens his life and compels him to embark on prayers for recovery during which he gets 'dreams' and sees 'visions' that direct him to head towards Lagos "where he felt he was needed." His decision to move to Lagos is impliedly based on his understanding of the city as a land of 'opportunity' especially because in Lagos, residents are continually plagued by problems (real, imaginary, self-inflicted) and they believe that their numerous problems "could be solved by their devotion to prayer" (142).

Piska Dabra is however a charlatan. Hence, his preaching is completely at variance with his personal conduct and attitude. While he preaches salvation and impresses it upon members of his congregation that it is possible to receive miracles through prayer, he sets about satisfying his lust by insisting that he must have indecent sexual liaison with the female members of his congregation because it is "one of the conditions of membership" (151). He goes as far as taking over completely the wife of another man and making her abandon her marriage and children. Indeed, the atrocities of Piska Dabra, (whose name awakens in the reader a magical concept of *abraka dabra*) are innumerable. By illegally taking over Salifa's wife, he deprives Salifa's children of a normal childhood and upbringing by both parents. Worse still, Salifa suffers an emotional breakdown, is upset, distraught and terribly disorganised to the point that Filia Enu's mother has to assume the responsibility of taking care of the poor children. He is also the perfect city fraud whose religious proclamations are merely a façade. While "he tried to dress simply and cleanly" (155) to deceive people into believing that he is a pious and simple man, greed and avarice are actually his true defining characteristics as he secretly uses his sons to acquire obscene wealth:

> Not long after his death, the story went that his sons owned shares in many industries, ran hotels, grew vegetables on a farm, owned transport industries, many plots of land and a large estate (155).

Perhaps, Piska Dabra is one of the city's immigrants who come into the city and change the city's character. Like Jagua of *Jagua Nana*, who brings her negative value to the city and makes it appear to be a city ethic, Piska Dabra appears not to have picked up the skill for his religious hypocrisy from the city. Rather, he brings his negative value into the city and adapts it to the city but invariably portraying the city as being amenable to negative values and practices.

As for Remi, she is a very significant character in *Iska* for two reasons. First, Remi is the heroine's first major contact on her arrival in the city and can therefore be regarded as her guide, instructor and indeed the person who determines the kind of life Filia leads in the city. The second reason is that Remi also represents hope in the novel through her life which utterly disgusts the reader at first and becomes even progressively appalling; but which later witnesses an incredible turnaround. Remi's marriage at the end of the novel signals hope of a possible regeneration in the city both for Remi as an individual and also for the city as an entity. The city has hitherto stood condemnable because it is believed to be irredeemable. However, that Remi can, and actually does find a man to believe in her enough to have taken her as a wife in spite of the indecent life she has led puts a question mark on the calibre of spinsters available to unwary bachelors searching for wives in the city. It is not clear if Remi's husband would still have consented to the union if he had had knowledge of the level of abuse and degradation to which she has willingly subjected her body. It is reasonable to hope that Remi will have an enduring happiness considering that the body of Jesus Christ was beaten, battered, broken, abused and vilified, but in the end it was glorified.

What is most important, perhaps, is the fact that Remi gives up a life of waywardness and does so in the city. It is to her credit also that she is a nice person. She is accommodating, generous and very hospitable. Remi takes in Filia Enu when the latter has accommodation problem shortly after arriving the city. She goes to great length to protect and 'guide' Filia in the ways of the city. "Lagos is not that easy for a single girl; one just has to learn" (95). She tells Filia sympathetically and she does not show anger or resentment when her 'provincial' friend demonstrates unwillingness to yield to values that run contrary to those she has been used to prior to coming to the city. Rather than get angry or give up on Filia,

Remi acts the provident and determined shepherd intent on winning more souls into her fold by offering a painstaking explanation on the imperative of Filia making philandering a way of life in the city.

> I was like that when I came […]. I walked from one office to the other, searching for work. I never even got the jobs […]. Then I met a boy. He was really honest and he did not demand. He did everything for me. He started me off […]. I can now pick and choose. A girl must have a boy in Lagos. A strong one (96).

In accordance with her belief, she is desperate and insecure. Also in line with her philosophy, Remi's life revolves around her affairs with men. She does not have a decent means of livelihood. She apparently has no education and it is not mentioned in the novel that she has training in any vocation. Her daily occupation is to go out with different men and she gets so 'busy' with her men that Filia does not see her for weeks despite sharing the same apartment because "before she woke, Remi had already gone, and when she returned, Remi was still away" (103). Her desperation and sense of insecurity comes to the fore when one of her boyfriends gives a false report about Filia after he makes an unsuccessful attempt to seduce her. Rather than for Remi to ask Filia for her own account of the incident, she hastily pronounces Filia guilty of attempting to snatch her boyfriend and orders Filia to leave her house. "Pack up and get out of my house. I tried to help you and then you want to steal my boyfriends" (106).

Perhaps, Remi acts rudely to her friend as a result of the frustrations brought upon her by the pressures of the city. Ekwensi seems to be suggesting that the demands of city life, the daily struggle of residents of the city to survive tend to strip them of their inherent goodness and the spirit of comradeship they possess thereby turning them into desperate, calculating and ruthless monsters who are insensitive to the feelings of others. Remi later apologises to Filia and even begs her for forgiveness lending credence to what seems to be the author's position that Remi is not an inherently bad person and that the pressures of city life may have been accountable for the inconsistencies in her character. Remi gets married in the end but it is not clear whether the various venereal diseases she contracts in her career will affect her fertility or how easy it may be for Remi, "an easy-life gal" (101), to settle down properly with just one man.

In *No Longer At Ease*, Joseph's life constitutes a serious indictment on the city as regards the way it appears to have a negative influence on the character of its inhabitants. Apart from his clerical appointment with the government, Joseph is a loafer without direction in

the city. He appears trapped and imprisoned by the thrills and frills of the city so much that he is incapable of making any major decision about his personal life. However, there is an indication in the novel that the city may not have been responsible for Joseph's failure to have a good start in life:

> Obi and Joseph had been class-mates at Umuofia C.M.S. Central School. But Joseph had not gone on to a Secondary School because he was too old and his parents were poor (12).

His circumstance no doubt constitutes serious impediments in the way of his making progress but what remains unclear is the extent to which the city may be blamed for his lack of drive as a resident of the city preferring to amuse and entertain himself with the frivolities the city provides for its inhabitants. It is to Joseph's credit, however, that he remains a loyal and dependable friend to Obi throughout the novel, never envying his now obviously more successful childhood friend or seeking to compete with him unnecessarily. Above all, Joseph is humble and well-meaning. He accepts responsibility for what he realises to be a betrayal of friendship and trust when he squeals to the president of their town union about Obi's plan to marry an outcast; explaining that he did it in good grace. Thus, Joseph is a good person by nature which can also be regarded as a vindication for the city that it does not always destroy the good character traits its inhabitants bring into it or influence them negatively. Having spent many years in the city, Joseph is sufficiently exposed to the vagaries of the city to the extent that his character could have been altered but he is steadfast and unwavering in his chosen path of honesty, commendable respect for ethnic affinity and an inspiring sense of comradeship. It is important to stress then, that while the city remains a place of possibilities – both negative and positive, residents of the city need to watch and prepare for the consequences of the choices they make. The choices the inhabitants make, whether they amount to blame or glory may not be credited entirely to the city, but also to the choice maker.

Honourable Nanga may not be the protagonist in *A Man of the People* but he is more of a city dweller than the major character, Odili Samalu. Nanga is an inhabitant of the city where he represents his constituency as a member of parliament. The reader therefore expects that Nanga's life and style of living would reflect some of the usual values of the city but this expectation remains largely unfulfilled throughout the novel. Although Nanga is crude, desperate and unrefined, neither the crudity in his character nor the desperation he exhibits in his political ambition appears to have arisen from his living in the city. This again underscores Achebe's peculiar treatment of his characters in the city. It can be

argued that what is truly 'Achebesque' about both *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* is that nearly all the characters are reluctant city people. Neither Obi Okonkwo nor Odili Samalu sojourns in the city on account of any real interest in city life or a desire to become a city dweller. Their presence in the city is a necessity. Obi comes to live in Lagos because the city, being the nation's capital with all the apparatus of government is the only place where he can put his newly acquired educational qualification to use. In the case of Odili, he is co-opted into visiting the city by his former teacher as he confesses to being fulfilled with his teaching job in the countryside. Hence, he treats a very serious issue of the existence of two opposing cities within one city with levity and unconcern by mentioning it casually. The morning after his girlfriend is seduced by his host; an angry and frustrated Odili takes a walk around the city:

> I met a night-soil man carrying his bucket of ordure on top of a battered felt hat drawn down to hood his upper face while his nose and mouth were masked with a piece of black cloth like a gangster. I saw beggars sleeping under the eaves of luxurious department stores and a lunatic sitting wide awake by the basket of garbage he called his possession (79).

Odili's observation fails to generate a desired effect because of the aloofness that is palpable in his narration. It does not seem as if he actually experiences what he describes.

In summary, there are many characteristics that clearly set Ekwensi apart from Achebe in their perception, disposition and treatment of the city but perhaps the most significant one is the free mixing together of people from diverse backgrounds which Ekwensi permits in his city books. His city dwellers tend to shed all ethnic and tribal inclinations as they interact with one another thereby demonstrating Ekwensi's conviction of the detribalising attribute of the city. He creates characters that see themselves as authentic citizens of the city with as much freedom, privilege and even misery as everyone else in the city. This attitude is different from Chinua Achebe's whose city characters appear to lack the confidence of citizenship. They nearly always see themselves as strangers in the city. The protagonists in Achebe's city books are also usually highly educated and knowledgeable individuals and they tend to view the city purely from a functional perspective – as a tool for the promotion of personal, regional or ethnic interest – the sharing of the national cake.

However, both authors seem to agree in their summation of the city as an entity that gives limitless opportunities to its residents but at the same time engenders division, strife and hostility among them. They appear united in their belief also that while the city provides

uninhibited enjoyment to its inhabitants, it heightens and exacerbates their misery in equal measure and generally stands in their way of achieving true happiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAIK NWOSU'S VISIBLE VOICE ON THE CITY

> Contemporary Nigerian fiction writers […] lack a clearly defined thematic focus. There are no heroes in our recent fiction, there is no national cause to fight for, no charismatic or ascetic character willing to make sacrifices for the common good. But there is corruption of the Nigerian dream, there is absence of a national ethos there is […] cultural dis-inheritance. Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song* is the engine room of Nigeria adrift (Charles Nnolim in "New Nigerian writing: between Debauchery and the Kitchen" *The Guardian*, Friday August 5, 2005, 29).

The above passage forms part of the lamentation of Charles Nnolim over what he views as the lack of thematic focus in contemporary Nigerian fiction. In a keynote address he presented at the annual convention of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Imo State Branch in July 2005, Nnolim takes contemporary Nigerian fiction as comprising fiction written between 2000 and 2005 and observes that "Lagos as setting has come to assume a special place in contemporary Nigerian fiction." His submission, however, is that the special favour the city of Lagos appears to have found among contemporary Nigerian fiction writers is such that makes the city a "symbol of corruption, hedonism, debauchery and shenanigans" (29). Nnolim goes further to identify what he describes as the "fleshly" school of writing submitting also that Maik Nwosu's *Alpa Song* belongs to this school because according to him, the novel deals with a "collection of people who come to Lagos from uprooted backgrounds" (29).

In exploring the works of the "fleshly" school of writers to which he contends Nwosu belongs, Nnolim avoids giving *Invisible Chapters,* Nwosu's first novel, a mention apparently because the novel does not support his classification. Indeed, Odia Ofeimun (2002) describes *Invisible Chapters* as a "novel about history" (1). Nnolim argues that the tendency by contemporary Nigerian fiction writers, especially those writing on the city, to

focus on the challenges of living in the city which are often myriad and multi-dimensional in nature constitute an absence of a "clearly defined thematic focus" (29) in their work. This work also observes and agrees with Nnolim that earlier generations of Nigerian fiction writers fought colonialism in their writings; they advocated independence and declaimed racism. The work further supports Nnolim's assertion that "there were heroes and martyrs in our literatures – heroes willing to die for the national cause" (29). However, this work is unable to agree with what seems to be Nnolim's contention that these are the only issues that can or should dominate the literary minds of Nigerian writers, especially the contemporary writers most of whom live in the city and consider it to be important enough to serve as the appropriate setting for their work. This work views the crisis of urbanisation, the behaviour of Nigerian cities and the implications for Nigerian literature especially as more people continue to throng the cities, a very important thematic focus for Nigerian writings.

Happily, even Nnolim seems to be aware of the reality as well as the implication of growing urbanisation in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. Hence, he notes that "people have abandoned 'home' and converged in Lagos." It is in line with this observation that this work proposes that if we are convinced that people will continue to 'abandon home' and 'converge' in Lagos thereby creating or worsening the existing poor condition of living in the city, then, the crisis that results from this daily movement should be one of the most important issues of concern to contemporary Nigerian fiction writers. In an interview he granted *National Life* and published in the Sunday February 15, 2009 edition of the paper, another contemporary Nigerian fiction writer and author of a collection of short stories, *Nights of the Creaking Bed*, Toni Kan, explains what informs the content of his writings:

> I want to write […] contemporary urban stories. I have lived in the city all my life […]. The city is my playground so I am depicting it […]. If you go to Unilag in the evening, you will see old men with fat tummies chasing young girls but when I write it in my book, they say I am being indecent. I am just writing what they are doing. (*National Life*, Sunday February 15, 2009, 21).

In an apparent attempt to rationalise Nnolim's position however, Kan observes that writers of Nnolim's generation are rather "reticent" and "prudish" while contemporary Nigerian fiction writers are more "explicit" in their approach to issues of concern. If Kan's explanation is acceptable and is taken as a representative submission of contemporary

Nigerian fiction writers, then, Nnolim's assertion that Nwosu's second novel, *Alpha Song***,** is "the engine room of Nigeria adrift" (29) may not be a fair assessment of the novel. Indeed, this thesis views Nwosu's voice in *Alpha Song* as one of the most positive on the city in recent times as textual analysis of the novel reveals.

Invisible Chapters is a novel about history (Odia Ofeimun, 2002, 1). It recreates the demolition of Maroko, a slum on the other side of Victoria Island (Lagos) by the military government of Colonel Raji Rasaki in the early 1990s. The demolition, which was carried out with military precision and swiftness, created in Lagos residents in general and residents of Maroko in particular a huge sense of betrayal and trauma especially because of the perceived callousness that attended the exercise. The impact of the demolition is believed to be so poignant among the residents of Lagos that Ofeimun chronicles how Maroko, the demolished slum, is memorialised across the genres of Nigerian Literature. In his commentary on *Invisible Chapters* titled "Invisible Chapters and Daring Vision," Ofeimun reveals that in poetry, Ogaga Ifowodo has written a collection entitled *Red Rain* in 1993 which he notes careered from a series he titled *Maroko's Blood* that later became *Homeland and other Poems*. Wole Soyinka also gives Maroko a mention in his *The Beatification of Area Boy* as contained in the minstrel's song for Maroko:

Maroko, what a ruckus
Over a wretched shanty town
It was stinking
It was stinking
We were rescued or we would drown

Maroko is also present in J.P. Clark's poem, *Maroko*, coming from his collection – *A Lot from Paradise* where he does not hide his aversion to the state governor's perceived insensitivity to the plight of the poor residents of the slum:

Col. Raji Rasaki
Governor of Lagos
In cold blood, expelled the poor at a loss
Doing in seven days clear

What God and war had not done in many a year

Similarly, Ofeimun, in his *London Letter and Other Poems*, uses Maroko as the central personage in *Demolition Day* where the focus is on an old woman whose "world of cardboard and decayed zinc" crumbles under the "antlers – and implacable mortars of bulldozers rolling."

Where cattle may be ranched and limousines

brace the lustre of flash sky-scrapers

pointing a rude finger in God's eye.

The preoccupation of these writers with the demolition of a slum in Lagos is an attestation to the fact that Maroko was a phenomenon that could not be ignored thereby, prompting Maik Nwosu to devote his first novel to addressing the Maroko experience. However, as advocated by the imitative theory in literature, Nwosu's story in *Invisible Chapters* is not a "servile imitation" of the Maroko experience. "The Maroko in the novel is clearly a fictional occult zone which may or may not remind anyone of the slum that was demolished on the other side of Victoria Island in Lagos ("Invisible Chapters and Daring Vision**,"** 2002, 2**).**

Invisible Chapters tells the story of the determination of Maroko residents to sustain their livelihood, friendship and the spirit of oneness that exists amongst them in spite of the decision of the military governor, Governor Omo-ale, to demolish their slum and the oppression of the sadistic land grabbers who do not waste time in converting the slum dwellers' erstwhile shanty town to their own, appropriately renamed New Queenstown. At the time the novel opens, Maroko, a Lagos suburb has been demolished and the residents are resettled at New Maroko. While those the government claims have valid papers are resettled by its agency, the New Maroko Development Board, those it claims do not qualify for resettlement because they do not possess valid papers have also resettled themselves thus turning the New Maroko to yet another haphazard settlement. The residents, now of New Maroko, cannot easily put the experience of the Old Maroko behind them because it is the place where they have lived as members of one large family sharing in one another's joys and sorrows. They therefore decide to undertake a nostalgic but harmless march to the Old Maroko now known as Queenstown, on the first anniversary of the demolition to hold a vigil.

To their consternation however, they discover on arrival that not only is Queenstown now being inhabited by new landlords but that the new landlords have secured the full protection of security forces who have been detailed to keep off trespassers. The policemen on guard at Queenstown threaten to unleash violence on the slum dwellers, a situation that compels the females amongst them to resort to the ancient practice of going stark naked to curse and put the fear of the gods in the police chief. This experience reopens the wound of their severance from their slum and instils in them a renewed determination to henceforth protect their dignity and oneness. The New Maroko is therefore not to be just another slum; it is to be a slum with a strong investment of emotion. Although the settlement has lost some of its most colourful inhabitants like Ignatius the Hunchback, the ace fisherman, Goomsi, the illegal immigrant who moves from one odd job to another, even as "a gentleman beggar" (16) until a train accident puts an end to his life and Madam Bonus, perhaps the most colourful of the three who can out-drink anyone. But New Maroko can still boast of many interesting characters like Prinzi, the "writer" who runs a snack bar, "principally for artists" (5); Haile, who "studied African History for four years in the university but eventually failed to earn a degree" (4); Ashikodi, who, although lives in Coconut Island, is a denizen of Prinzi's café; Centigrade, the community's "doctor"; Segilola, the adopted daughter of Madam Bonus as well as ex-convicts and returnees from the Biafran war. The New Maroko even has a Kaabiyesi, whom no one has ever seen but whose mythical influence is promoted by Shanka and Alhaji Kaita Alhaji.

Central to the narration of events in the lives of the characters of this unique novel is the incredible humanity of the slum dwellers whose lives are controlled and dominated by genuine friendship, love and enviable sense of duty and responsibility towards one another. Perhaps united by poverty and a deep sense of helplessness at the growing insensitivity of government and its cronies, the slum dwellers live within a close sense of community that keeps them inseparable regardless of ethnic and religious differences. By sharing in one another's joys and sorrows, they also succeed in ameliorating the drabness that their lives would have been especially as they make self celebration their major defining characteristic.

Invisible Chapters does not follow the regular pattern of a narrative with an identifiable story line. Its story consists in the daily struggle of a people determined to uphold their

dignity and to give and receive love from one another either in times of joy or sorrow. It is significant therefore that the novel closes with two major events that are representative of the two emotions. Kaabiyesi, whose existence is either real or imagined, dies at the end of the novel providing an occasion for a grand funeral that brings the slum dwellers together. The happy event which produces the same effect is the marriage between Ashikodi and Segilola, perhaps the only virgin ever found in a brothel.

The occasion also gives Prinzi, the self-styled writer and "Prince of hearts" an opportunity to present a novel he spends the entire lifespan of the novel trying to put together to his newlywed friend, Ashikodi. "There was only one copy, a special wedding present to a special couple on a special occasion in the life of New Maroko: the seemingly invisible chapters of dreams at work: Apart from the cover page, the contents were three hundred blank pages and a seven paragraph appendix entitled, In the Beginning… RFA Revised First Attempt" (266). *Invisible Chapters* is a positive voice on city life – it is an eye-opener to the possibilities that exist in the city, possibilities that many urban writers may not see or may deliberately fail to acknowledge. These possibilities include that of friendship, communal living, genuine love, sincere affection and dignity even in the face of the city's apparent ugliness.

Alpha Song brilliantly exposes night life in Lagos, vividly capturing the glitz, glamour as well as the dangers on the streets of the city, especially at night. The protagonist of the novel, Taneba Brass, who also tells his own story, has an unhappy family history having lost his mother at an early age. Worse still, he is subjected to inhuman treatment by his father's new wife prompting him to flee to his maternal uncle who not only takes custody of him but also ensures that he is educated up to the university level. Young Taneba however remains unhappy for many reasons. One, his father's death provides his step-mother and her children, acting in connivance with members of Taneba's paternal extended family, the opportunity to reject him rather categorically. Two, Taneba has nursed a deep-rooted anger and bitterness against his father prior to his death over what he perceives as his father's lack of will to stop his new wife from maltreating the young Taneba and even more for failing to come for his son when he flees home to seek protection with his maternal uncle. It is as a result of this unhappy circumstance that in spite of his uncle's kindness to him, Taneba consistently regards himself as an outsider in his home: He is persistently haunted, psychologically tortured and completely overwhelmed by a deep feeling of rejection, alienation and sometimes hopelessness.

At the beginning of the novel, he is a relatively young man of twenty five years of age, a university graduate and a staff of one of the federal government parastatals – the Postal Services – where his maternal uncle also holds sway. To a casual observer therefore, the protagonist's path appears neatly cut and his life promising; but the void created by his familial history and the permissive nature of the city of Lagos combine to set him on a completely different path – a path of night life, incurable womanising and alcoholism at the end of which all he has to show is a story so sordid that it leaves a sour taste in the mouth of the reader. Taneba resorts to wandering as a pastime after the close of work each day in order to avoid returning to his uncle's house too early in the day, preferring to go there only at bedtime. Consequent upon his wanderings, he discovers fun spots in the neighbourhood which initially cater to his psychological needs; but on the New Year's Day that also marks his twenty-fifth birthday and with his uncle and family out of the city to celebrate Christmas in the countryside as is usual with city dwellers, Taneba's loneliness is more poignant and his search for fun as succour becomes more intense than what the neighbourhood fun spots can satisfy.

It is also on this day that providence or fate brings him in contact with an old school mate, Tamuno, who initiates him into night life and other negative tendencies that are prevalent in the city. Tamuno, who was a truant way back in their university days and for whom Taneba wrote his thesis for an agreed fee that was never fully settled, has by now become a "big man" in Lagos managing a night club and dealing in illicit drugs. Taneba refuses to allow his responsible, well-meaning and caring uncle to mentor him in the city. Rather, he chooses Tamuno as his guide and anchor on city life, promptly moving out of his uncle's residence as if to announce his freedom. Although to his credit, he refuses to join in his friend's drug trade even when he loses his job and becomes homeless but he revels in moving from one night club to another sampling women and soaking himself in alcohol. Altogether, he spends ten years on the streets of Lagos during which time the women he encounters and sleeps with are innumerable. He also fathers two children the mother of one of whom he actually desired to marry only to discover shortly before their planned wedding that the woman was engaged to his late father before his death. The shock and emotional trauma Taneba experiences upon this discovery threatens his sanity as he battles with what he assumes to be the "ghost" of his father still haunting him and refusing to allow him to have a claim to true happiness.

He leaves the country shortly afterwards through a career advancement programme under which he is assigned to establish and manage a foreign branch of his organisation in New York City. Once in New York, Taneba attempts to continue with his philandering but the legal environment of New York turns out to be different from what obtains in Lagos and he falls afoul of the law, culminating in his being committed to a two-year jail term. While in prison, he seeks and obtains the assistance of the former girlfriend of his now late friend who left the country earlier on the strength of a love relationship with a foreigner which did not however stand the test of time. It is a thoroughly repented Taneba that falls in love with Tamuno's former girlfriend, Faith, whom he marries and with whom he lives in New York for another ten years during which time they both become active members of a new generation church and are blessed with a son – Viva.

Sadly however, Faith dies within this period turning Taneba, once again, to a lonely and miserable man. Finally at forty-five and now nursing a terminal disease, he returns to Nigeria and embarks on unsuccessful attempts at re-connecting with his two earlier children. He however conducts a symbolic burial of his father and bequeaths to his five-year-old son, the sad tale of his life and times emphasising and impliedly warning him not to indulge in night life because "night life is […] the universe of drifters" (166).

A careful reading of both *Invisible Chapters* and *Alpha Song* reveals that contemporary Nigerian fiction writers are as concerned as the old generation writers about the unfavourable condition of living in the city. In *Invisible Chapters* for example, Nwosu shows his sadness and worry over slum dwelling as a major feature of Lagos, if not its defining characteristic. As if in agreement with Onibokun (1973) who, in an article in *Land Economics*, identifies the conditions that shape the physical environment of cities in the developing countries, discovers that "most of the cities in the developing countries are plagued with […] slums" but argues that "a slum does not emerge on its own; it is created by the actions and reactions of people" (*Land Economics*, Vol.49, No 4, Nov. 1973, 21); Nwosu, through his fictional characters in *Invisible Chapters*, provides an exposé on the causes, nature and complexities of slum dwelling in Lagos. The slum in the fictional Maroko is created by a combination of factors including wrong approach to governance manifesting in the form of lack of planning; double standard, insincerity, trivialisation of serious issues of state and outright misuse of privileges by the agents of government.

The decision to demolish the fictional Maroko appears to have been taken in haste and without consideration for the general well-being of the evacuees leading to inadequate provision of alternative houses for them. To make matters worse, those assigned with the responsibility of allocating houses at the New Maroko choose to ridicule the government and compound the slum dwellers' woes. The criteria for allocation are enunciated in the novel as follows:

> As a spinster, you're entitled to a single-room apartment, but we're also allowed a certain latitude in these things. I'll make an exception and give you a three-bedroom apartment (109).

But to another person the rule is different:

> […] Under the rules guiding this board, we can't assign you a room in the New Maroko. You do not meet the character requirement, and this haven is intended for a certain category of upright and responsible persons […] (110).

To further make a mockery of the entire exercise, only those who possess the "basic requirements" in the form of "a lease agreement or a proof of house ownership" (110) among the slum dwellers can aspire to the level of being considered for selection or rejection. Even then, the "lucky" few among them who eventually get selected have yet another ridiculous hurdle to cross: they must declare their loyalty and support for the government in power. For the majority who have lived in rented apartments at the Old Maroko, they are summarily disqualified from seeking allocation at the 'New Heaven.' It is instructive that even in spite of the dubious criteria used in allocating houses, actual houses available at the New Maroko are grossly inadequate to go round the number of resettlement certificates issued by the government leading to another falsehood being sold to the evacuees by the Resettlement Board to the effect that although the "settlement […] had been carefully planned," "[…] the Resettlement Board […] was moved into making more allocations than are allowable." The consequence is that:

> In no time at all […] those unfortunate ones and the many illegal residents set about erecting their own shanties, with the result that soon the area looked more like the Shanty Town that was Maroko than any government-logic New Town (146).

Another reason why the New Maroko may never be saved from slumming is the continuous upsurge in the population of the slum. Notwithstanding the fact that the place is already overpopulated and the facilities (if any) are dangerously overstretched, New

Maroko continues to play host to more people throughout the world of the novel. There are the Biafran war returnees who were not among the original inhabitants of the old slum but who are warmly received and accepted as settlers in the New Maroko. In this group there is Opio, the travelling magician who finally comes to settle in New Maroko apparently because the slum provides him with enough crowds for his performances. There is also Orita, the man who aspires to be Opio's pupil. Then, there is Chief Tanker, the man with a tank of an appetite who feeds his fellow slum dwellers with his own war stories. Asampete, the dazzling beauty in search of her biological father also considers the New Maroko as the most probable place where she may find him. Within a very short time, she becomes settled enough to establish a school. The list is endless and all of them in "a settlement clustered around an incinerator" (148). The pertinent question Nwosu seems to be using his novel to ask is: Can the city ever be rid of slums?

A corollary to the above thematic preoccupation of *Invisible Chapters*, which is also a recurrent theme in the works of old generation writers on the city, is the city's penchant for displaying opulence beside poverty. Chinua Achebe deals with this concern in all his city books although his treatment of the subject is not quite engaging in both *No Longer At Ease* and *A Man of the People.* Nevertheless, the protagonist in the latter novel, through an early morning walk from the opulent house of his former teacher who is now an Honourable Member of Parliament, observes this disparity and in *No Longer At Ease*, Obi Okwonkwo also comes across and muses over this unhappy trend while driving through the city. In *Invisible Chapters*, following the evacuation of slum dwellers from the Old Maroko and their resettlement in New Maroko which rapidly turns into a more slumming settlement, the land at the Old Maroko is promptly sold to the affluent members of the same city who erect structures befitting of their social class.

> […] the buildings seemed like competing chest-thumpers imported from the great cities of the world. Affluence and prosperity had evidently become the double-breasted suit of where Maroko once grovelled in dirt in its tattered nakedness. An inner city that had been nothing but shrivelled buttocks and flabby breasts and tobacco-stained teeth had become a wondrous metropolis [New Queenstown] of robust posteriors and bulbous anteriors and gold-filled dentures (38).

Similarly, Achebe and Nwosu are not the only writers who are concerned about what seems to be the insensitivity of the city planners to the plight of the urban poor. John Reader **(**2004) laments that a majority of city dwellers in Africa live in "settlements that

lack even the most basic amenities" (163). Describing the settlements as slums, he observes further that "these settlements […] are only an hour or so from the extravagances of the city (*Cities*, 163) thus lending credence to the concern being expressed by all generations of Nigerian writers on the city about the obscene display of opulence in Nigerian cities even in the face of growing poverty in the same cities.

Another major area of agreement between the old and contemporary writers in their view and treatment of the city is the tendency by both generations of writers to insist that notwithstanding the many problems associated with living in the city, the village is not a preferred option. Interestingly, Nwosu and other Nigerian novelists, old and young, are joined by scholars and observers of urban life who have expressed a similar view on the subject. For example, Reader (2004), asserts that "contrary to the idealized Western view of the countryside as a haven to which city-dwellers yearn to escape [...], prospects are even worse in the rural areas," adding that "the cities may be poor, but the countryside is poorer still" (*Cities*, 163). Nigeria's prime producer of city lore, Cyprian Ekwensi, makes the point of emphasising in all his city books that the countryside is not to be preferred to the city. He also points out, through his books, that beyond poverty, there are other issues pertaining to the safety and general well-being of individuals that make the city a preferred option in spite of the city's numerous problems. In *Iska*, for example, the mother to the heroine of the novel provides an insight into one of these issues:

> And so we came home […]. Your father brought a Hausa *Mallam* with him to protect him from evil men […]. I will tell you this […]. It was since we came back from Jos that I began to know about witchcraft. Sometimes when I sleep it seems to me that a heavy stone has been rolled over my body and is choking me (*Iska*, 55-56).

It is a similar experience with one of the characters in *Alpha Song*, Yellow, in his country home. In *Invisible Chapters*, Nwosu insists on this point using the life experiences of more than one character as illustration, but Mama Badejo's experience may suffice as an illustration. Mama Badejo, poor and twice-widowed with children, ekes out a living in Old Maroko by frying and selling bean cakes to her fellow slum dwellers before the demolition of the slum. The Resettlement Board of New Maroko refuses to allocate an apartment to her in New Maroko on the grounds that she lived in a rented apartment in Old Maroko and that only those who owned their own houses while there are qualified for allocation in the new settlement. Now homeless, confused and frustrated, Mama Badejo decides to relocate to the village with her children so as to put the problem of homelessness behind her

forever. Her first port of call is the family of her last husband where she however discovers that she is regarded as not worth more than a piece of the family property. Her refusal to allow the oldest male member of her late husband's family to 'acquire' her promptly sets her against all members of the family who proceed to unfairly put the blame for her husband's death on her.

Next, she tries her own natal village where, again, she has to contend with the task of fending off the sexual advances of all sorts of men in addition to joining her aged parents in their peasant farming. The worst problem that plagues her in the village and one which she finds impossible to deal with is "the bizarre gossip of her own people who seemed unsure whether she was a witch or an accursed woman" (241). Finally, she meets someone from the city who confirms to her that her fellow slum dwellers at the New Maroko "had not disappeared from the face of the earth" (241). This assurance imbues Mama Badejo with enough courage to return to the city and upon her return, the author observes that "[…] now that she was back, she felt as if she was home - finally" (241).

Contemporary and old generation Nigerian novelists on the city also share a similar concern on the plight of the urban poor which is one of the dominant themes in *Invisible Chapters.*

However, whereas old writers tend to treat the aimless drift of city dwellers, a majority of whom are poor and tend to move as the tide of the times moves them, adrift at individual character level, Nwosu takes the concern to a communal level in *Invisible Chapters*. Hence, apart from the communal fellow-feeling that characterises the daily living of city dwellers in the novel, the humour of self celebration that tells of a people who never give up hope and the way they share in one another's joys and sorrows which help in ameliorating the drabness of their lives, they have nothing to show for their sojourn in the city. While the intellectuals among them prefer to engage in endless rhetoric that promises so much but delivers nothing, those with vocations hardly earn enough to guarantee their immediate sustenance let alone plan for their future. Yet, many others have no visible means of livelihood. Thus, one common feature that seems to bind them together is their propensity to drift almost aimlessly.

The tendency of the urban poor to move adrift is further aided by the dubious activities of power mongers in the city. Indeed the plight of the urban poor in the novel provides a sordid exposé on the power structure in the city which the author insists is unchanging as

evidenced by the fact that in spite of the propaganda that attends the government demolition of Old Maroko supposedly to protect the inhabitants from slumming and disease, no sooner have the inhabitants been moved to their new settlements, New Maroko, than the supposedly new place begins to resemble the old one because the real problems of the inhabitants are left unresolved. The timing of the demolition, on a Christmas eve, also attests to the insensitivity and callousness of the high and mighty in the city who continue to take the urban poor for a ride on account of the people's inability to protect themselves from the agents of power. Although the daily existence of the slum dwellers appears to know hope and the communal fellow-feeling existing amongst them empowers them for a spirit of protest which they carry out from time to time and in different ways in the novel, their tragedy stems from a weak organisational base that is easily overridden by the power mongers and their agents. The seriousness and depth with which Nwosu engages the planners of the city and the way he shows their culpability in perpetrating poverty and slum dwelling in the city is unique, different and a clear departure from the way the old generation writers treat the same subject as old writers tend to merely scratch the problem on the surface. Rather than treat the problem with the proverbial kid gloves, Nwosu makes a bold attempt at exposing the lack of transparency that characterises the power structure in New Maroko and if we take Maroko as a microcosm of the city, then, Nwosu, in *Invisible Chapters* overtly shows the lack of transparency that marks the power structure in the city just as he laments the powerlessness of those that ought to 'do something about it' thus affirming Toni Kan's submission that unlike the old generation writers who tend to be "reticent" and "prudish" in approach to issues of concern, contemporary Nigerian city novelists are more "explicit"(21) in their writings.

The place of religion in the city and the menace of religious charlatans who take undue advantage of the gullibility of most city dwellers essentially because the city tends to subject its residents to a myriad of problems is also a common source of concern and worry to both the old and the contemporary Nigerian writers on the city. Again, what appears to separate the contemporary writers' approach from the old generation writers' method is that old writers tend to present city dwellers more or less as helpless victims in the hands of religious charlatans; contemporary writers however seem to hold the view that many residents of the city get some kind of kicks from the antics of religious charlatans and that they may be no more than willing victims at least some, if not all, of the times. In *Invisible Chapters*, for example, the lives of the inhabitants of Maroko are somewhat enlivened by

the ridiculous activities of a religious priest who promises to make them millionaires by issuing them false cheques which he claims they can only cash in spiritual banks. To demonstrate that many city dwellers have become wizened, experienced and knowledgeable in the ways of the city and that religious absurdity can have implication and consequences only for the foolish, Nwosu shows how some members of the congregation promptly throw away their cheques in apparent realisation of the foolery of succumbing to trickstars while the obviously foolish ones pick up the rejected cheques to add to their own in a bid to multiply their millions. However, Nwosu seems to be in agreement with many old generation novelists whose view appear to be that religion constitutes a serious distraction in the city because rather than pay serious attention to the business of realistically planning their lives, many city dwellers pursue frivolities that can only lead them to nowhere.

Nwosu's vivid and convincing presentation of Lagos as an all-comers city where the ethnic origin, tribe or ancestry of inhabitants is irrelevant to the day-to-day living of residents may be seen as resembling Cyprian Ekwensi's conviction and treatment of the same subject.

A careful reading of *Alpha Song* however reveals a dimension that is not only different from Ekwensi's style but one which is wholly unique and much more vibrant. In Nwosu's *Alpha Song*, the ethnic origin, tribe or state of origin of nearly all the characters is either unknown or not clear. The origin of the major character, Taneba, is the clearest in the novel, perhaps because he is the protagonist. He claims to have come from Kaiama Creek in an unnamed state. Even his name, Taneba, hardly awakens in the reader an association with a distinct group of people in Nigeria and he compounds the mystery about his ancestry by changing his name to Baneta in the world of the novel only to change it back to Taneba. His surname, Brass, is just as curious. His closest friend and ally in the city, Tamuno, grows up in an orphanage having been abandoned by his biological parents who are not known in the novel. He is picked up and raised by a kind-hearted woman about whom the novel also does not provide an insight:

> He had been abandoned at birth dumped outside the orphanage. There was no way of knowing who he was, but he had been named Tamuno: the name for God in the overseer's language (*Alpha Song*, 117).

Mairo, another character in the novel with a name that suggests that she may have had a northern ancestry, is however impliedly so named "because she had been born in the north (65). There is no further indication in the novel as to Mairo's real parental background or ancestry.

The profile of yet another character in the novel, Yellow, indicates that he grew up in "Uzi Quarters, a middle town settlement beside a city with a generous allocation of cranks" (128). His name, Yellow, is a derivation from his skin pigmentation because he is an albino. Esther is reported to have run to Lagos from her unnamed "forgotten village" (168) while Bantu, the eloquent story teller, belongs to nowhere and everywhere at the same time with his endless travels around the world. In the novel, Bantu usually begins his travels from Lagos to Montego Bay, Santa Isabel, Tabiti, Zanzibar and back to Lagos from where he normally starts another round of journeys within the country starting an NGO somewhere only to abandon it in order to return to Lagos. There is also Lovelyn in the novel, originally named Elizabeth but uses Lovelyn as a 'trade' name. Lovelyn or Elizabeth comes to the city, like her fellow city dwellers, from an unnamed village, state or region of the country. Nwosu however considers it important for the reader to know that the reason for the young woman's sojourn in the city is because her parents' marriage is a "complex" one and the burden of looking after her younger siblings rests squarely on her. One character whose origin is the most difficult or, perhaps, the easiest to explain is Toshiba because her ancestry is traceable to four races:

> Her father was Ijaw and had named her Tongha. Her paternal grandmother was Chinese and named her after the city where she was born; Shanghai. Her mother's mother was from the Philippines and had named her Imelda. Her mother was English; she had named her Barbara. It was from these four names … she had pieced together the name she answered; To-sh-i-ba (94).

What Nwosu seems to be implying by his deliberate refusal to allow his characters to lay claims to particular sections of the country is that the intermingling that characterises city life is so potent that it strips city dwellers of tribal, ethnic or even racial affinity. In other words, there is a complex mix of diverse ethnic and racial groups in the city that transcends racial or ethnic affiliations.

In the same vein, it seems also that the negative implication of this intermingling and perhaps, more importantly, the undesired consequence of not having a sense of family kinship in the city appears not to be lost on Nwosu. For example, his protagonist in *Alpha*

Song suffers untold inner torture due to his failure to experience normal family life as a growing child and even as an adult. Consequently, he attempts to fill the psychological void in his life by debasing young girls in the city. In the case of Tamuno, the orphan, he manages to attend a university only to win a bet; little wonder he is unable to pay attention to his studies culminating in his thesis having to be written for him by the protagonist purportedly for a fee that remains unsettled throughout the novel. Even his "working" life in the city consists in managing night clubs, doing "runs" (a euphemism for drug deals) and 'helping' uninitiated friends like Taneba to get prostitutes.

As for Angel, she is an incredulous liar who initially paints an enviable picture of a supposed middle class family history only to turn around to confess that she actually comes from a primitive family whose members have been named after a shrine and that "her name was not Angel" (192). And of course, Yellow is an ex-convict and a two-time inmate of a mental home who later becomes a traffic officer in the city charged with directing and controlling traffic. Yellow's ultimate ambition in the city is to join the mainstream police force and become a veritable "officer of the law." Nwosu appears to be saying that the cultural rootlessness of his characters constitutes an absurdity and that it has far reaching grave consequences on the city.

The pertinent question seems to be that; could Plato have been justified in banning the modern city from his ideal republic? Plato observes that the uncontrolled and unregulated intermixture of people of different virtues and idiosyncrasies which the city engenders is capable of inducing a corruptive force which can in turn make the society ungovernable (M. C. Jaye and A. C. Watts, eds. 1981, 180). Consequently, he maintains that the size of his ideal city should not be larger than one in which the citizens can be addressed by a single voice (Reader, 2004, 304). Many casual observers of city life will undoubtedly be tempted to despatch Plato's submissions to the garbage can especially because of what they may consider to be the philosopher's apparent lack of foresight regarding the possibilities of the microphone, the megaphone, radio, television and other modern means of mass communication. However, it is necessary to state that Plato's concern goes beyond the problem of communication. He is averse to large concentration of people in cities because of the problem of urban anonymity that it breeds, which in turn fosters immorality, criminality, delinquency, all manner of bad behaviour and materialism. He seems to believe that if the population is not too large, it would be possible to know what everybody is doing and members would serve as a check on one another.

Moreover, events in *Alpha Song* point to the fact that while Plato's ideal city may not be feasible in the modern world and his fears about society becoming ungovernable now overtaken by the modern technologically based method of governance, his assertion about the negative consequences of the intermingling of people of diverse backgrounds and histories who come to the city only to jettison their hitherto cultural heritage still remain valid. Tamuno, the night club manager and drug dealer is ignorantly worshipped by the boys he recruits to do his dirty work for him. Fondly referred to as the "Don," Tamuno's boys do not only fear him, they respect his 'ingenuity' and desperately wish to be like him. It is instructive that many of the boys who work for him when he is alive in the novel continue to serve as body guards, bouncers and armed robbers to other people in the city long after Tamuno's demise. One of the sad but inevitable consequences of cultural rootlessness in the city which is brought about by unhealthy intermingling of people from different backgrounds is the eventual arrest of one of Tamuno's boys as a member of a notorious robbery gang. Tamuno also ends up being brutally murdered by suspected rival drug dealers in the city. Invariably, therefore, intermingling of different people in the city is capable of inducing, and it does induce, a corruptive force on the city inhabitants some of whom may have been innocent and well-meaning when they newly come into the city.

A major problem plaguing the city and which contemporary fiction writers on the city tend to treat with greater depth than the old generation writers is how desperation very often underlies the motives of city dwellers' sojourn in the city. *Alpha Song* appears to deal with a collection of desperate people as nearly all the characters in the novel are in the city either because they desperately want to run away from problems they believe exist elsewhere but not in the city or they are in desperate pursuit of perceived opportunities in the city. For example, Yellow is rejected at birth "because his father could not believe that it was he who had fathered an albino" (130). From his childhood therefore, Yellow's life is plagued by rejection, lack of affection as well as psychological instability. As an adult and living in his place of birth, Uzi Quarters, a certain Papa Real openly threatens to kill him if he does not leave the village. Papa Real is a well known local criminal and is believed to be in possession of dangerous charms with which he kills and maims his perceived enemies. No one in Uzi Quarters appears to entertain doubt as regards Papa Real's magical powers and when he threatens to make Yellow "disappear," if he refuses to leave the village, Yellow flees to Lagos in desperation to safeguard his life and also eke out a living in the city. Now in the city, Yellow is even more desperate to acquire spiritual power with

which he hopes to return to Uzi Quarters to confront Papa Real. His desperation takes him to a dubious church in the city which claims to have imbued Yellow with sufficient spiritual powers to confront and defeat Papa Real. He returns to the village in an attempt to claim his right to live in his birth place without fear; but Papa Real will not let him be especially as the supposed magical power he brings from the city appears to be fake. Hence, it is an insane Yellow that flees back to the city under the real or imaginary spell of Papa Real.

However, with the kind assistance of his fellow city dwellers who promptly take him to a mental home, Yellow regains his sanity with a resolve to remain permanently in Lagos and never to go back home. In other words, his desperation to stay on and survive in the city under whatever circumstances assumes even a greater intensity. Although Papa Real is reported to have died later in the novel, Yellow's response when Taneba asks him if he plans to return home is instructive:

> God forbid! As this one die so, then go promote another one like am to replace am. I don comot from Uzi final (161).

No one and nothing seems to have pursued Angel, also known as nameless, out of her home and family; but she appears to be the one chasing after a life her family cannot afford to offer her. According to her, her parents earn an income that "only ensured that no one starved" (187) whereas, her one desire in life is to move into the "big league" which only Lagos can put her. Her determination to achieve her goal is however accompanied by desperation. Hence, Angel tells lies about her life, her family, even her name all in a bid to make enough money that can facilitate the achievement of her warped goal. Indeed, Angel's true story and real circumstance remain unknown throughout the novel. What is clear about Angel is her desperation to achieve whatever goal she has set for herself.

Perhaps, Tamuno may have been the only exception to what seems to be the general malaise of desperation afflicting the characters in *Alpha Song* since he is not an immigrant to the city. Ironically however, he seems to have been the worst hit by the bug of desperation. Tamuno is desperate to prove to his unknown parents who abandoned him at birth that he does not need their love, care and support to survive. Hence, he declares emphatically that: "Beyond a point, it's no longer a game: it's break-neck hustling with everything you've got" (28). Tamuno tries to desperately cling onto life even as gun shots are being fired into him. His attackers and eventual killers have to fire as many as fourteen

bullets into him; yet, "every bullet went into him and he was still alive" (117). Even Chief Stephen, Tamuno's long time friend and business associate, is unable to understand the reason for Tamuno's desperation:

> I still do not understand. Excitement? Anger? Attitude? Laughter at the society or revenge for parental abandonment? There was something more, but we may never understand it (117).

Only Bantu seems to understand why desperation is the controlling spirit in the city as evidenced in his description of the city as the "capital of desperation" (35).

Like the old generation writers on the city, contemporary Nigerian fiction writers also appear to believe that sexual immorality is a regular feature of city life. The protagonist in *Alpha Song*, Taneba, flagrantly refuses to contemplate marriage with a twenty six year old woman in the city because she is reportedly a virgin. "A virgin, at twenty-six, in Lagos?" (142) Taneba exclaims incredulously. According to the protagonist:

> A girl who was still a virgin at twenty six, after going through the university seemed more suited for a psychoanalyst's couch than my bedroom ((142).

He avoids the girl like the plague and begins a search for a wife among the 'experienced' women in the city because he wants "experience" from his women. At the end of Taneba's search, he finds a woman who not only has sexual experience, but who has also been a would-be wife to his own father having been betrothed to the old man before his death. At the time of this discovery, the "experienced" woman is already expecting the protagonist's baby. Interestingly, notwithstanding the fact that the woman possesses 'requisite experience,' Taneba is unable to go ahead with his earlier plan to walk the woman down the aisle claiming that what worries and prevents him from getting married to the woman has nothing to do with morality as he is not horrified by the sudden realisation that he has been sleeping with his late father's fiancé. According to him, the discovery that his intended wife may have loved his father is what he finds difficult to handle. Thus, contemporary writers tend to examine the concern of sexual laxity and immorality in the city with great panache as they treat other issues about the city.

Also, contemporary fiction writers like Nwosu seem to hold the view that inhabitants of the city are often reckless with the freedom the city gives them. Nwosu illustrates this concern in *Alpha Song* through the way characters in the novel frequently change their names; beginning with the protagonist whose first name is Taneba and family name Brass

but who, claiming anger against his father, decides to drop Brass and to adopt Taneba as his surname. Hence, he changes his full name to Taneba Taneba. Towards the end of the novel, he becomes Baneta Baneta only to announce after conducting a "symbolic burial" for his father that he has decided to reclaim his father's name. Then, there is Elizabeth who insists that the name she uses, Lovelyn is a "trade" name; there is also Yemisi, who renames herself Jacqueline; Angel is generally known and addressed as nameless because she gives a different name to whoever asks her for that information (185). Aisha is known as "her majesty" and even Bantu, the tourist has no immunity against what seems to be the city dwellers' penchant for falsehood as he confesses to Taneba that his name, Bantu, "was his final corruption of his much – corrupted given name" (35). He fails to supply his real name. In addition to falsifying his name, Taneba has the infamy of constantly editing and re-editing his life history of which he has many, disparate versions.

Perhaps what constitutes the most significant departure of contemporary writers from the old writers in their respective handling of the city as setting for their works is illustrated by Nwosu especially in his *Alpha Song* where he seems to be insisting that the cultural rootlessness in the city engenders kindness and gives hope of decent new forms of communalism among city dwellers although it must be acknowledged that the city is characterised by chaos, disorderliness, unhealthy competition as well as sexual and other types of immorality. In spite of the protagonist's love for night life, fun and women, he is categorical in his determination to avoid shady business deals in the city. A more apparent proof of the positive possibility in the city is illustrated through the protagonist's chance encounter with Mairo, a girl still in her teens but who has already become a full-time prostitute in the city. Following Taneba's chance encounter with the young girl and upon his shock discovery that she is a professional prostitute, the protagonist resolves that:

> The same way that I had been adopted – by my maternal uncle, by Mama Senegal, by Tamuno – I had adopted her in my heart, perhaps as the little sister I never had.... if ever I did nothing else, this was one girl I would save.. (65).

With his moral and financial assistance, Taneba not only saves Mairo from the inglorious life of prostitution, but he also gives her the privilege of going to school and becoming a university graduate thereby adequately equipping her to settle down as a married woman and later, a mother. Also, notwithstanding Taneba's addiction to clubbing and night life which is capable of turning him into an irresponsible person, he demonstrates uncommon dedication and diligence to his job throughout the novel regularly earning his employer's

commendation and accolade. “I am very happy with you, Taneba ... I am very pleased with you and I do not usually tell this to my employees” (201). His employer tells him with sincerity. Indeed, *Alpha Song* is replete with positive possibilities and incredible optimism.

Similarly, although Esther works in a night club; she never takes part in immoral activities which her colleagues indulge in on a daily basis as she refuses to be seduced by any of the club’s patrons. Rather, she performs her duties with utmost diligence and earns her living without subjecting her body to sexual abuse just as she never undertakes any activity she reasons may endanger her life. Also worthy of note is the fact that there are decent men among those that patronise night clubs in the city. For example, Esther secures a decent job while still working at a night club and her new employer happens to be a club patron who gives a personal attestation to Esther’s good character explaining that he has observed the young girl over a considerable length of time and has found her worthy of being his employee. Also, Esther’s acknowledgement of Taneba’s good character is a testimony to the fact that the city is not wholly populated by vagabonds, prostitutes and the never-do-wells: “You be better man, proper person. God dey inside your heart…” (169).

Another character in the novel, Tricia, is a worthy illustration of the presence of chastity in the city. Taneba encounters Tricia at a night club, but she refuses to give in to his amorous advances demanding instead that the protagonist cultivate a proper and decent relationship with her if he truly cares about her. “I don’t sleep around. I just come here to have fun” (126). She tells Taneba with confidence and without mincing words. To Tricia’s credit, she refuses to yield to Taneba’s persistent effort to sleep with her throughout the novel. Thus, events in *Alpha Song*, the attitude and eccentricities of characters in the novel seem to provide enough bases for this work to support Egunjobi’s (1999) assertion that cities are inherently neither good nor bad and that cities are like fire which can be used or misused. This view of the city is succinctly summarised by Christopher Morkey’s *Where the Blue Begins*:

> All cities are mad; but the madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful; but the beauty is grim. (Cited in Egunjobi, 1999: 3).

The city as fire which may be used positively or misused finds perfect illustration in Nwosu’s *Invisible Chapters* where one of the characters attempts to convert the freedom in the city to a bizarre ingenuity. Goomsi moves from one odd job to another but he is a master of none of them and it is hardly surprising that he gets increasingly frustrated to the point of resorting to begging as a means of livelihood. However, realising again that he

lacks solicitation as his 'gentleman' begging goes largely unheeded; he becomes desperate to survive through begging and starts to feign injuries. Other times, he gums his eyes and acts the blind man or invents hard luck stories. Still, he reckons there is no significant improvement in his fortune. Finally, Goomsi chooses to misuse his liberty in the city by bracing up for "Maroko Surgery" designed to transform desperate destitute into "proper beggars" (16). This he tries to achieve by waiting for the train by the rail track and then sticking out his leg as the train rolls by him with the intention of earning a severed leg in the process so that with only one leg, he will be able to evoke enough pity in the residents of the city such that his begging career will become more lucrative. Unfortunately for Goomsi however, he miscalculates and instead of a severed leg, the train severs almost his entire lower region thereby terminating his miserable life (16).

Making a positive use of the fire the city epitomises is Nwosu's presentation of the city in the same novel, *Invisible Chapters*, as an entity where oneness, togetherness and the spirit of comradeship are in existence. The Maroko phenomenon teaches that it is possible to reduce if not totally eliminate loneliness and anonymity from city life and to engender communal living which is believed to be in existence only in the countryside. William Dean Howells (cited in Pedro Juan Soto, 1981) advocates the division of the city into villages and hamlets in order to make it liveable. In *Invisible Chapters*, the existence of New Maroko within the larger city of Lagos and the happiness and contentment radiating among the inhabitants of the settlement appear capable of lending credible support to Howells' argument. What seems to be the problem, however, is how the division of the city into villages and hamlets will not be carried out along class lines. How poverty, distress, lack, anguish and hopelessness will not be the foundation of unity and forced happiness among a cross section of inhabitants of the city seems to be Nwosu's greatest concern in his city books.

Given the uniqueness of *Invisible Chapters* and the atmosphere of communal living that pervades the entire novel, it is difficult to single out a particular character as being major or as being the protagonist since all the characters live as one another's keeper in line with the design of the author. However, some characters can be easily identified as perhaps leading characters based on their visibility in the novel. Such characters include Prinzi, Ashikodi, Segilola, Haile and Centigrade. Similarly, it is not easy to determine which character survives better than another in Nwosu's city because communal rather than individualistic style of living is prevalent in the novel. Prinzi is a jolly good fellow and interesting to

interact with. He is charming, friendly, brotherly, accommodating, intelligent, humorous, social, understanding, bold, courageous and brave. However, he is also frivolous and seems to lack the focus and determination expected of a serious minded person. Perhaps, Prinzi's worst character traits appear to be his lack of strong will and organisational ability. He is incapable of turning dreams into reality. Prinzi is a self-styled name which he gives himself because he fancies himself as "a prince of hearts" (5). Nwosu describes him as "a portly, bespectacled fellow," who runs "a snack bar, principally for artists" (5) which he prefers to call a café. He is also a self-styled writer on account of a single short story "Footsteps," which he succeeds in writing and publishing in a local newspaper. Upon the publication of the short story, Prinzi makes several photocopies of the piece and mails them to a long list of his associates with elaborate notes. Prinzi reminds the reader of the hero of *No Longer At Ease*, Obi Okonkwo with whom he shares a lot of attributes and character traits.

Like Obi, Prinzi is essentially a mere dreamer, an idealist who lacks the will of a doer. Apart from leading the pack of drifters in *Invisible Chapters*, Prinzi does not achieve anything tangible throughout the novel apart from speaking "big grammar" which is one of the few tendencies that distinguish him from Obi who reportedly speaks "is and was" (*No Longer at Ease*, 29), at a time when his kinsmen at Umuofia Progressive Union look up to him to tell them in concrete terms how he intends to use his newly acquired education to benefit his people. Like Obi, Prinzi is also unable to translate his much flaunted knowledge into concrete action such that can better the lot of his fellow slum dwellers in Maroko despite the fact that he is highly revered and eminently looked upon for succour by the people. Prinzi's weakness and incapacity are better exemplified by the failure that dominates his personal life resulting in his inability to realise his life ambition, He announces his intention to write "the great Nigerian novel" very early in the novel and when asked for his reason for citing his café at Maroko, he replies that Maroko provides for him the most ideal environment for his writing ambition emphasising that "there must be something about the slum that draws the artist" (5). He appears quite believable at this stage in the novel. However, at the end of the novel and during Ashikodi's wedding when Prinzi has the opportunity to present the 'novel' he has spent his entire life trying to put together, there is only one copy and "apart from the cover page, the content is made up of three hundred blank pages […] (266).

Thus, Prinzi spends the entire lifespan of the novel talking rather than writing the much talked about novel. Prinzi's failure at writing a novel he makes so much noise about summarises the failure of his entire life. He is a drifter and like Obi Okonkwo, the tragic hero in *No Longer At Ease* who appears very promising but proves incapable of using his intellect to benefit himself let alone his society, Prinzi is a mere idealist, a talker rather than a doer. Also like Obi, Prinzi suffers incarceration in the novel. What sets Prinzi apart significantly from Achebe's hero, however, is that unlike Achebe's Obi who fails to survive in the city on account of his weakness, Nwosu's character appears rugged and able to weather the precarious storm in the city. Hence, he spends only two weeks in detention. Sadly however, his detention experience fails to bring about a positive change even if in the form of a renewed determination to improve on his fortune let alone the fortune of his fellow slum dwellers who earnestly look up to him.

To his credit however, he succeeds in organising a handful of protests with his friend, Ashikodi, but the protests do not produce the desired changes. It is not surprising therefore that nothing changes in Prinzi's life throughout the novel, not even his marital status. Although, he begins what looks like a promising relationship with One, another quiet, almost anonymous character and at the end of the novel, the relationship is no longer a secret to their fellow slum dwellers, there is also no concrete plan by the 'couple,' no marriage plan known either to them or to the entire community. They seem to be moving simply as the tide moves them – adrift. It is little wonder that his café serves merely as a rallying point for his fellow slum dwellers to converge, talk and purportedly strategise on how to confront the powers that be in the city with a view to liberating themselves from the excesses of the power mongers but without really doing so. Prinzi appears to be intelligent enough to know that he and his fellow slum dwellers are being taken for a ride by the 'high and mighty' in the city who donate cows to them for communal rituals and public ceremonies; but he cannot stop the swindle in spite of his overwhelming knowledge. Perhaps, the unchanging attitude of Prinzi even after his incarceration and his failure to change the pattern of his personal life by taking some decisions that are far-reaching and following them up with action, is representative of the unchanging ways of power in the city.

Thus, Prinzi's incapacity to write "the great Nigerian Novel" in spite of his intellectual ability and what seems to be his sincerity of purpose symbolises the powerlessness of the urban poor at altering their situation. Happily however, it appears that at the end of the

novel, Prinzi has begun to write the novel as evidenced by the seven-paragraph appendix titled "In the Beginning…RFA. Revised First Attempt." It is reasonable to hope also that Prinzi's private life is set to witness a turnaround with the confidence, boldness and lack of secrecy that have come to define his relationship with One. The unblocking of Prinzi's genius may just be one of the many triumphs of the slum dwellers in the city.

Ashikodi appears to be a much deeper character than Prinzi in *Invisible Chapters*. He is a successful graduate of history and is perhaps the most elevated of the slum dwellers not only because he resides at Coconut Island and only regularly visits Prinzi's café at Maroko; but also because he does not seem to be as much of a drifter as the Maroko slum dwellers although he is accepted as "a non-resident Maroko person." He appears to be faring well in the city having successfully established a livestock farm on which he invests his time and energy to nurture. Like his livestock farm, once Ashikodi finds Segilola at Maroko, he goes after her with the zeal and determination of a conqueror and not even her long and almost over-stretched resistance could dissuade him. His consistence and long-suffering pays off at last and Segilola agrees to a courtship with him thereby flagging off a whirlwind romantic affair that culminates into marriage at the end of the novel. Ashikodi is real, focused, determined, humorous, friendly, interesting, brilliant, deep and thoroughly genuine. He is also creative with tremendous talent in the arts of acting, singing and dancing all of which he puts into fairly good use. Fondly called the 'Roko' by his compatriot slum dwellers interpreted to mean the spokesman of Maroko people, Ashikodi is a great dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions which only he however understands. Prinzi once challenges him: "How come you are the only one dreaming the dreams and seeing these visions" to which Ashikodi responds: "what is the dream-vision but another realm of reality" (22). Ashikodi is a phenomenon that brings great relief and even joy to the misery that otherwise will have characterised the daily lives of the Maroko residents.

On the eve of the demolition of the Old Maroko, Ashikodi leads six of the slum dwellers to carry out a symbolic burning of the effigy of the state governor, Governor Omo-ale as a mark of protest of the demolition of their slum but members of the group appear not to be sure of the significance of the exercise and Ashikodi explains diligently:

> This is our last night in Maroko forever […] and I thought we should share this communion […] wherein we energize one another for the contest ahead. Tonight may in the end become the foolish dream of a man with a hundred voices, but our society surely needs

> dreamers […] and better it is to suffer the worst type of defeat than never to dream and dare (117).

Such is the deep intellectual strength of Ashikodi. Little wonder that after the exercise, Segilola, who has previously rebuffed his love advances, openly and sensationally declares her acceptance of him saying, "me I've truly discovered him" while Prinzi also praises him, "you know, you are really something… and that is not a light compliment" (118). No doubt, Ashikodi has a lot of depth to his character that makes him stand out among his peers. He is also a realist. He does not indulge in foolish illusions about his ability and that of his group. He recognises the strength of the powers that be in the city, which he says consists in their having the law on their side. He knows also the limitation of the group he leads as not having the law on their side which means they may not be able to go far. Nonetheless, he firmly believes that all great actions and achievements in life usually begin with simple dreams. He tells his fellow slum dwellers rather solemnly:

> Certainly, the law is not on our side, but the law is not always right… I, Ashikodi… I am not afraid to dream… I dream a world. I dream a world of universal fraternity as the religion of man (117 - 118).

In spite of all his lofty dreams however, Ashikodi also fails to transform his dreams and visions about Maroko people into reality. With his level of education and especially going by the sense of purpose and commitment with which he relentlessly seeks after and finally secures Segilola's love, perhaps Ashikodi may have been able to bring about an appreciable level of improvement in the lives of the Maroko people if he has deployed all his craft in the struggle.

Sadly however, Ashikodi chooses to confine himself to the realm of rhetoric, dazzling and mesmerising his audience with good oratory and scintillating stage performances, all of which amount to nothing at the end of the novel. Even more disappointing is Ashikodi's disappearance for three whole weeks when he senses that the heat is on the slum dwellers. During this period, he ensures that he is not seen even at his permanent residence in Coconut Island and not even Segilola can explain his whereabouts. It is instructive that by the time he reappears, he does not give an explanation about his disappearance and the slum dwellers appear too carried away by the joy of his return to worry about his disappearance. Soon, it is rhetoric all the way again.

The significance of Ashikodi's character therefore consists in his inability to make a change in the city. He neither influences other city dwellers positively in any significant way, nor is he positively affected by his stay in the city. This is especially true in view of

his elevated position, his great learning, sense of organisation, charisma and the adoration he enjoys from all city dwellers that come across him; yet, he fails to transform the goodwill he has into any concrete action. Ashikodi may be surviving well in the city but his failure to achieve a better condition of living for the Maroko residents is tantamount to living the life of a drifter in the city. If viewed from this perspective therefore, Ashikodi may not be different from Prinzi for he appears incapable of impacting positively on the city and its residents. Perhaps Ashikodi is a mere drifter in the city, just like his compatriot slum dwellers.

Segilola, the adopted daughter of Madam Bonus, is arguably the most formidable character in *Invisible Chapters.* Segilola is enchanting, beautiful, cheerful, radiant, intelligent, creative and interesting. Yet, she is deep, thoughtful, focused, determined, decent, serious, responsible and dependable. She has a pathetic family history beginning with the death of her unnamed mother and dancing colleague of Madam Bonus while giving birth to her. This was after her mother's attempted marriage to a highly polygamous Benioise (Segilola's father), was prevented by a gang-up of the man's five other wives. Segilola is therefore an orphan because she has known neither her mother nor her father and although her birth has occurred during Christmas season, a time usually associated with joy and laughter, her life seems to have been dogged by strange experiences usually at Christmas such that she has come to believe that "there must be such a thing as a Christmas jinx" (48).

In spite of her unhappy circumstance however, Segilola refuses to give in to sorrow or despair. Also notwithstanding the fact that she was raised in a "shack" in slummy Maroko by a kind-hearted but alcohol-loving Madam Bonus, Segilola is determined to make her mark in the city. Although she is a graduate of a catering school she means a lot more than a caterer to Madam Bonus and Maroko residents:

> Segi was the toast of New Maroko. Both the enchanting dancer at the Bonus Club as well as its manager, her virtuousness was, to many, as puzzling as it was endearing. On the dance-floor, she was quite a naughty temptation; off it, she was the incarnation of forbidding virtue. She it was who usually strove…to temper Madam Bonus's drinking excesses (20).

It is indeed incredible that a young girl who does not know her biological parents, who is raised in a slummy neighbourhood of a permissive city and whose foster mother and 'guardian' is an alcoholic, remains a virgin throughout her maiden life. Even more astonishing is the fact that Segilola has spent her formative years in a brothel where she

was born but she refuses to yield to the corrupting influence of her environment and is unwavering in her determination "to make the best of a life that could be better" (65).

Nwosu seems to be using Segilola's character to make a positive statement about the city and to insist that it is possible to survive and even live well in the city without succumbing to the city's negative influences. Segilola's life, character, conduct and utterances in the novel all bear testimony to the abundant positive possibilities in the city even in spite of the city's apparent challenges. Nwosu successfully uses Segilola to convey his optimism and hope in the city. The author seems to be saying that if a young girl with no decent background, no parental love and guidance can work in a city like Lagos, then the city itself works!

Upon the sudden death of her foster mother. Segilola successfully takes control of the management of the Bonus Club. She organises the girls and even the men in the employment of the brothel and gives the brothel a competitive edge over its business rival, the Good Evening Hotel. Added to her good managerial skill is her excellent ability to manage crisis. When an epidemic breaks out in New Maroko and leaves in its trail causalities that include one of the prostitutes at the Bonus Club, prostitutes at the Good Evening Hotel promptly begin to spread the rumour that all the girls at the Bonus Club have been infected with the dreaded Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) virus thereby discouraging patrons of the Bonus Club from further patronising the club with a view to ensuring that business at the Bonus Club is completely paralysed. Again Segilola rises to the occasion:

> She declared the Bonus Club closed for the time being and organized medical tests for the girls. To their own surprise, none of them was diagnosed infected (206).

Segilola's activities in the novel also tend to underscore the arrival of women in the scheme of things in the city. With Segilola's excellent performance, her astute business sense, industry and high intellect, the modern woman seems to be acquiring a new destiny and relevance in the city. The relevance of women in the city also promises to go beyond the freedom and liberty the city grants them which the countryside has denied them for so long; to include the more important function of coordinating, controlling and administering people and resources in the city to the overall benefit of humankind.

Perhaps, the most endearing part of Segilola's character is the dignity and high sense of decorum with which she handles Ashikodi's love advances to her which earns her not only

Ashikodi's respect but also the respect and admiration of all observers and watchers of their intriguing love story. Although she has the disadvantage of having been raised in "the city of sin" (205) and even the added misfortune of having to live and work in a brothel as a young adult; she nevertheless resolves "never to become another sex commodity" (65), which her late mother and Madam Bonus were at the Kalakuta republic prior to her birth. Her resolve to live a life different from that led by Madam Bonus and her late mother informs her abhorrence of sexual liaisons with men that patronise the Bonus Club and gives her the inner strength to reject Madam Bonus's counsel to her to "take in a man or two, at least" (65), on the excuse that she is a woman after all and that she should not deny her body "its natural cravings." To Segilola's credit, she avoids illicit sex with clients of the Bonus Club and she does not give in easily to Ashikodi's love advances despite being aware that his interest in her is genuine and notwithstanding the fact that she feels the same way about him. Segilola is a pride to womanhood in the city.

Centigrade is interesting, good-natured, kind, hardworking, generous, accommodating, well-meaning, ambitious, focused and strong-willed. Although Centigrade's character appears to be a blessing to the fictional residents of Maroko, it however casts a heavy indictment on the city. The indictment is not so much because there is a dark aspect to Centigrade's ancestry since many of his compatriots are either unsure or are absolutely ignorant of their parentage and family history. The indictment results from Centigrade's arrogating to himself the competence of a medical officer in the city without training, skill or certificate to back up his claim; the fact that he enjoys the patronage of all Maroko residents including the supposedly educated and enlightened ones among them who are aware that he is not a trained medical doctor; and also the fact that at no time in the novel is he picked up or questioned, let alone punished over his illegal medical practice.

With a character like Centigrade, the city is exposed not only as an entity that permits sexual immorality but also one that encourages quackery and other forms of lawlessness. Like most characters in the novel, Centigrade experiences a great deal of difficulty while growing up. He is brought up by his biological mother but does not know his father and when his mother remarries, his stepfather's hostile attitude to him leaves young Centigrade in no doubt that he is not welcome, thus compelling him to abandon home at the tender age of nine. Having left home without acquiring any formal education or vocational skill and with no money, Centigrade takes to wandering and although he learns dancing in the process, "he eventually graduated into a quack doctor as a means of survival" (126).

Centigrade's character reveals yet another attribute of the city which is that the city provides an enabling environment for the achievement of even the most difficult life ambition of its residents. For example, Centigrade has the ambition of becoming a 'landlord' by building a house of his own which appears to be an impossibility considering his circumstance. Interestingly however, Centigrade achieves his life ambition in the city without having to steal and he even becomes the 'messiah' of the highly respected Prinzi.

Known variously in the Maroko community as 'Dr. Swallow' because of his penchant for encouraging his clients to swallow their saliva as a first stage in the treatment of serious ailments, as Centigrade because he always insists on diagnosing every ailment with a thermometer and as 'ajasco dancer,' Centigrade proves to be on top of his trade by developing 'power drugs' which nevertheless often manage to solve his clients' health problems. Although, he is reported in the novel to be sometimes only one step ahead of the police or some of his enraged clients whenever they nearly get killed by his concoctions, he is lucky to evade arrest throughout the world of the novel and his fortune improves as his concoctions also get better. The only time centigrade falls afoul of the law is when he reflexively protests the demolition of his house in the Old Maroko over which he is beaten up and locked up in a police cell. The excitement that greets his release and arrival at New Maroko is an indication of the importance of a man whose service has become indispensable to the people. Even highly rated residents like Segilola and Prinzi openly endorse his practice. "That Centigrade is not a bad doctor after all," Segi says while Prinzi agrees that "the fellow is marvellously promising" (171).

Centigrade's character seems to be making a statement to the effect that the type of character that survives best in the city is one that is bold enough to dare. Events in *Invisible Chapters* indicate clearly that Centigrade owes his success as a quack doctor merely to the audacity of his ambition rather than to any expertise, skill or legitimate knowledge. Centigrade is not merely ambitious, he is audacious, daring and ruthless. He allows nothing to stand between him and his set ambition. The way he goes about getting an apartment for himself at New Maroko is illustrative of his character:

> […] He turned the door of one of the houses and found it locked; he simply drew back and attacked the door until it caved in. he then declared the apartment his, regardless of the fact that the Resettlement Board had declared him uncertifiable as a legal resident of Maroko. (145).

Thus, Centigrade proves to be a quintessential city inhabitant, smart, dexterous and quick-witted with ability to confront and surmount obstacles that pose as challenges in the way of achieving his personal goal and ambition. The tragedy of the city and its residents however, is that Centigrade's supposed medical practice constitutes a health hazard to Maroko residents and the entire city since it is founded on quackery and more especially because he has no plan to actually acquire the knowledge and skill that can qualify him to practise as a medical doctor. Characters like Centigrade are a menace to the city especially because the urban poor are so plagued by poverty that even when they know that their lives are being put at the mercy of quacks, they may not be able to alter their situation because those in control of the city, those charged with overseeing the welfare of city dwellers, are pre-occupied with enriching themselves at the expense of overseeing the well-being of residents.

As for Taneba Taneba, the subject and narrator of events in *Alpha Song*, he is a man of many parts. Fondly called the "genius" by his admirers, Taneba is a consummate intellectual. He is brilliant, intelligent, deep, honest, hardworking, kind, generous, interesting, well meaning, highly principled and inexplicably admirable. However Taneba is also excessively playful and recklessly adventurous. In spite of possessing an incredible likeable aura, he is egoistic, frequently indulges in self praise and appears incapable of showing genuine appreciation much less gratitude for good turns done to him. Like most characters in city books, Taneba's sojourn in the city ends in disappointment, failure and catastrophe. Again, this raises the questions as to what determines the success or failure of a character in the city and what type of character survives better in the city.

Events in the novel as narrated by Taneba suggest that personality factors combine with the condition in the city to create the protagonist's undoing in the city. It is possible to argue that two major factors are directly responsible for predisposing the protagonist to failure and destruction in the city. These factors include his addiction to night life and what seems to be his reluctance to forgive perceived wrongdoing. Taneba appears to have had little or no experience with members of the opposite sex before he attains the age of twenty-five which occurs in the city. Perhaps, his naivety about relationships with women accounts for his eagerness to experiment with different women especially finding himself in a city reputed for its wayward ways. Taneba's chance meeting with Tamuno at a time when his mentor in the city is away to the countryside also paves the way for the protagonist's inglorious induction into night life. However, the reader believes and sympathises with him

when he complains of feeling lonely in his uncle's house. His claim appears both legitimate and believable because of his age and stage in life. Hence, the reader identifies with him and understands that in spite of having a relatively good job in the sorting department of the General Post Office, facilitated by his uncle, he does not find the job engaging enough and is easily pre-disposed to contemplating rather unhelpful ways of passing the time:

> Wandering the streets…was…my other occupation. In my maternal uncle's... apartment bursting from corner to corner with children and maids, I was more or less an absent resident. Usually, I preferred to come home only to sleep. Between the time I must leave the office and the time I must go home. I hung around the streets... including weekends when loneliness usually drove me with a whip like a merciless school master (7).

Assessing Nwosu's hero from this view point makes it almost mandatory to concede that perhaps, the city's characteristic coldness and anonymity constitute veritable sources of misdirection to Taneba in the city. It is therefore not difficult to understand and empathise with Taneba over what turns out to be his misadventure in the city through his foray into night life. Also, his unhappy family history, the physical and psychological alienation he suffers at a tender age following the death of his mother and his father's perceived insensitivity and neglect of him resulting in his stepmother maltreating him to a point that he has to flee from home, all make Taneba's entrance into night life in the city easy to understand.

However, a careful examination of his life in the 'testament' he leaves for his five year old son reveals that apart from his unhappy family background, peer pressure and even the vagaries of the city, the protagonist's personal idiosyncrasies may have at least worked together with these other factors to seal his unfortunate fate in the city. Taneba confesses that "I loved the night because it was in my blood" (2); thereby absolving the city of blame over his calamitous life. Providing further insight into his addiction for night life, he reveals that his relationship with the night goes far beyond him, beyond his sojourn in the city and that the problem is traceable to his ancestry extending as far back as the third generation before him all of whom he admits loved the night to the extent of wanting to die at night so as to catch up with it.

> […] All I can hope for – like my mother before me, like her mother before her – is to depart this world at night...Perhaps, then I will catch up with it (3).

The novel gives account of how the protagonist's father was also deeply in love with the night. Eve, the woman who would have been Taneba's father's fourth wife if he had not died the week the wedding was to have taken place and whom Taneba later meets during his night runs and impregnates before he finds out that she was his late father's intended wife number four, testifies that Taneba's father "also ran with the night hoping to catch it" (220). Similarly, it is difficult to identify the city or its wayward ways as being solely responsible for the ease with which Taneba takes to philandering, moving from night club to night club. He appears dexterous in his arts, like a professional or even more like someone who has a natural inclination for a restless way of life. It is significant that like his father, who was said to have been married to three different women (at different times) in his life time, Taneba also fathers three sons, each by a different woman thus lending credence to genetic tendencies rather than environmental influence as a controlling factor over Taneba's behaviour in the city.

Another probable reason for Taneba's many problems in the city appears to be his inability to forgive people who may have knowingly or otherwise offended him and it is no wonder that he ends up being his own nemesis at the close of the novel. For example, he demonstrates extreme and almost unreasonable anger towards his late father's spirit and refuses to forgive him almost throughout the novel. Similarly, Taneba refuses to forgive his fiancée, Eve, just as he fails to complete the kind gesture he earlier extended to Mairo because Mairo offends him and he is unable to forgive her. Perhaps, his failure to trace Mairo and the son she impliedly has for him may just have been the direct consequence of his refusal to forgive her misdemeanour earlier in the novel. With characteristic self-righteousness, Taneba claims that the reason he does not forgive Mairo is "because she did not have the drive and the vision to make a clean break with the life in the streets at night" (81); but he is unable to justify his treachery towards Eve, a woman whose only wrongdoing consists in her being betrothed to Taneba's serial polygamist father at a tender age of sixteen by her uncle who was her only surviving relative having lost her two parents. There was impliedly no sexual relationship between Taneba's father and Eve because the marriage did not take place. Yet, Taneba claims that his "psychology rebels against living with" (223) Eve despite having put her in the family way. He announces with an air of pomposity that "I left her in tears" (223), thereby ruining the goodwill he has hitherto enjoyed with the reader such that by the time he returns to the city after ten years

to try to locate Eve but "could find no trace of Eve" (227), the reader has no more sympathy for him.

Also, Taneba's reluctance to overlook people's mistakes may have been responsible for the long and undue self-imposed psychological torture he undergoes over his father's memory. Not even the spirited effort of Eve could save him from unnecessary self-torture.

> Let it go, Taneba, and find something in your father to be proud of,
> if we insist on judgment, no one will be sane or saved (223).

Taneba however chooses to remain unyielding insisting that "It's this simple. I spit on my father still (223)," describing him as a "creep masquerading as a genius" (223). Interestingly, Taneba is widely acknowledged in the world of the novel as a genius, could he also have been a creep masquerading as a genius, a case of like father like son? Taneba extends his uncharitable utterances, lack of decorum and almost irresponsible conduct and behaviour to his maternal uncle thereby portraying himself as an ingrate.

To his credit, he acknowledges the invaluable role his uncle has played in his life by taking him in from the age of fifteen and ensuring that he is educated up to the university level; it is also commendable that he recognises the man's immense goodness towards him by getting him employed and re-absorbing him when he makes a mistake and even going as far as attempting to secure for him a decent girl to marry so as to consolidate his hold on the city.

However, Taneba's general attitude in the novel, including the fact that he does not seem to find any of his uncle's wise counsels useful enough for him to adopt, is capable of suggesting that his appreciation may not have been profound. Worse still, utterances such as "I do not particularly care for my maternal uncle" (219) and "I made no effort to contact him" (228) are reflective of an ungrateful psyche.

Notwithstanding these flaws, Taneba demonstrates an incredible sense of proportion which further underscores the fact that the prevailing unfavourable circumstances in the city can, at best, only combine with personality and several other factors to shape the destiny of inhabitants of the city. For example, Nwosu's hero in *Alpha Song* sets the boundaries for his escapades in the city and operates strictly within those boundaries. He seems to make 'balance' his watchword while exercising his city-given liberty. Despite Taneba's love' for

the night and the vagaries of the city, he is resolute in his decision not to engage in drug deals even at a time when he has no gainful employment:

> I presented myself at Chief Stephen's office […] with the resolution that at the first suggestion of anything remotely resembling a "run," I would excuse myself and return to my poverty (91).

Also in his interaction with other characters, there is a consistent, indeed, unanimous affirmation that Taneba is good natured. "You be better man, proper person: God dey inside your heart" (169), Faith declares to him during one of their encounters and the same feeling and opinion about Taneba run through the entire novel. It is significant also that Taneba is able to rise above his bitterness and anger against his father at the end of the novel. He visits his birth place, "Kaiama Creek to conduct a symbolic personal burial" for his father (228). He also reclaims his name - the name he has earlier renounced - and accepts his father's genius.

Tamuno is an unfortunate character who proves to be incapable of surviving in the city. Although he is boisterous, daring, courageous, calculating and ambitious, he is also restless, extravagant, and dangerous. To Tamuno's credit, he appears to be a very deep person. He is caring, humane, loving, affectionate and very likeable; but the negativity about his personality is so overwhelming that his destruction in the city seems inevitable. For someone who was abandoned at infancy, who grew up in an orphanage without real parental love, guidance and direction, Tamuno's history easily predisposes him to a life of instability especially in a large and cold city like Lagos. It is no wonder therefore that right from his university days which he attended only to win a bet, Tamuno has no grand desire to live a respectable or dignified life. "I just want to stay high until I die" (120), he tells Taneba piteously. To him, staying perpetually 'high' is a necessary antidote to mooning uselessly about the parents who have abandoned him at birth. Although, the particular town or city where Tamuno grew up is not named in the novel, the environment is impliedly permissive enough to provide the impetus for the young Tamuno to have grown wild:

> Life at the orphanage was […] stiff […] Tamuno soon found a way to run […] loose on the streets. […] from hanging around a local eccentric […] who tried to induct him to the fraternity of smokers, he progressed to stealing chicken […] (118).

It appears that Tamuno's unhappy childhood, the crisis of identity which plagues him and the environment of the city which tends to aggravate loneliness and heighten a sense of insecurity all combine to define for him a pattern of attitude and disposition to life which may not have been innately his own. Indeed, there is enough indication in the novel to suggest that Tamuno is essentially a good man. Perhaps, a careful look at his relationship with the protagonist, his workers and the only woman he seems to love may lend credence to this assertion.

From the time Tamuno meets Taneba on the street until Tamuno breathes his last in the novel, he regards and treats Taneba with utmost respect. He shows Taneba genuine care and support in every way possible without making pretences about his own unhappy background. He acknowledges Taneba's intellectual superiority over him and mentors the protagonist in his relationship with the night. Apart from doling out cash gifts and helping him to acquire the confidence to interact with members of the opposite sex, Tamuno also links Taneba with Chief Stephens, Tamuno's business partner, who employs Taneba and saves him from the untoward consequences of unemployment. Tamuno remains a true friend to Taneba throughout the novel. He is dependable, kind, understanding and humane. When he observes that Taneba suspects him of being a professional assassin, Tamuno quickly allays Taneba's fears, convincingly assuring his friend that killing people is not one of his business concerns. In other words, that he also sets the limit as to how desperate and how far he allows his unhappy circumstance to push him in the city. What seems to be the flaw in Tamuno's character which turns out to be his undoing in the city is overconfidence:

> I manage the night. […] anything at all that goes on in the night […] I've got a little finger in it. Anything you want done in the night, or anything you want the night to do for you, just whisper to me (12).

There is no doubt that Tamuno is an ambitious man which is not only legitimate but also commendable in a city where inhabitants have to labour hard before they can make ends meet. However, his desperation to carve a niche for himself in the city can only be understood to have been caused or, perhaps aggravated by an equal desperation to rise above his unhappy background. It appears Tamuno believes he needs to convince himself and indeed everyone around him that he is capable of surviving and getting very well established in the city regardless of his parents' cruelty to him, hence, his favourite saying, "tomorrow robins will sing" (102). It appears also that there is a prevalence of unhealthy

competition among the inhabitants of the city which explains why Tamuno always finds it necessary to boast about his accomplishment in the city. For example, apparently in an effort to underscore his arrival to the club of the "big boys" in the city, when Taneba asks Tamuno to clarify the term 'managing the night' and particularly whether it includes doing the "runs," Tamuno's answer that "it's one of my departments" (11), appears to be indicative of a psyche that suffers internal torment arising, perhaps, from the fear of failure and the need to constantly assure himself that he is surviving well.

The overconfidence that is evident in Tamuno's response is perhaps at the root of his gruesome murder later in the novel. It is also possible that the dangerous rivalry and competition which are prevalent in the city have more roles to play in occasioning Tamuno's misfortune and gruesome murder than Tamuno's inadequacies. Tamuno handles and treats his staff both at "The Owl" and at "Seventh Heaven" with incredible humanity. Fondly called the "Don" as a mark of admiration, it is to Tamuno's credit that none of his workers has any complaint about his management style or nurses ill-feeling about his personality and general conduct at both places. Perhaps, Tamuno's greatest virtue is his capacity to tame his excesses regarding his relationship with women. He confides in his friend, Taneba, that whenever he succeeds in finding a decent girl to love and cherish, he would demonstrate responsibility towards her and Tamuno proves to be a man of his words for as soon as he meets Faith, who is decent and well educated, he promptly introduces her to Taneba as the woman of his dreams, although his sudden death prevents the relationship from blossoming into marriage. Taneba's tacit agreement with Tamuno's judgement concerning Faith appears to have aided Taneba's decision to marry her after Tamuno's death. Tamuno is an enigma, a phenomenon and his death in the novel is justifiable only to underscore what seems to be the author's admonition that there are implications for the pattern of living city dwellers select in the city and that there are consequences for the choices residents make in the city.

Alpha Song seems to confirm that the city is permissive and that it offers a lot of liberties to its residents; but the novel also appears to emphasise that as residents of the city exercise these liberties and make certain choices in favour of others, they unwittingly determine their destiny in the city. Tamuno's philosophy in the city is to stay "high" till death. He stays high till death, but the implication is that death comes to him much sooner than he wishes.

Mairo is introduced to the reader in *Alpha Song* as a teenage prostitute thereby initially confirming the notorious image of the city and creating the impression that she is irresponsible, whimsical and desperately wayward. Further acquaintance with her however reveals that beyond Mairo's seemingly reckless exterior lays a character very solemn, responsible, well-meaning, innocent, reasonable and deep in her own way. Perhaps, because she is living in the city at an age that is considered by many to be highly impressionable, Mairo is fun-loving, uninhibited and calculating. Her sojourn into prostitution at the tender age of fifteen is reportedly due to a combination of factors including poverty, illiteracy, poor parenting and the permissive nature of the city. Mairo recounts to the protagonist how her family was once faced with imminent destitution following the sudden death of her father and the denouncement of her mother by her father's relations for allegedly having a hand in her father's death.

According to her, this unhappy situation results in her mother goading her into joining the ring of Nigerian girls who travel abroad to earn money in the flesh market (66). Her refusal to yield to her mother's entreaties creates disaffection between mother and daughter to the extent that she runs away from home "to the Mecca of opportunity prospectors: Lagos" (66). Now in Lagos, an old school friend who plays host to her on her arrival in the city introduces her to the world of the streets at night thus catapulting her into a life she has refused to travel abroad to live. The city's culpability in predisposing its residents to chart a destructive path for themselves as a result of the struggle to survive in the city is evident in Mairo's account of her experience as a young prostitute on the streets of Lagos:

> Them dey rush me … Na so I begin see the kin' money wey I never see before. Na the thing wey finally spoil me be that (66).

Mairo's story suggests that the condition in the city tends to strip its immigrants of whatever high moral principles they must have held as sacrosanct while living in the countryside and which often accompany them to the city. It seems that the city's characteristic individuality and anonymity which compel residents to struggle for daily survival usually do not permit them to accord enough regard to moral principles. It is arguable therefore that Mairo is merely a victim of circumstances especially in view of the remarkable transformation that takes place in her life following her encounter with the protagonist. Indeed, Taneba's spirited and genuine effort at saving Mairo from the streets presents an interesting twist to the widely held negative image of the city. It deconstructs the notion that the city is populated only by vagabonds, prostitutes and the never-do-wells

on one hand and selfish and desperate wealth seekers on the other. Taneba's life-saving mission, which he appropriately tags the "Mairo Project," consists of his determination to take Mairo off the streets, and by implication off prostitution, get her properly accommodated, see to her acquiring a sound education and generally assist her in living a stable, settled and decent life in the city. "This was one girl I would save from those indelible scars" (65). He declares with determination.

Interestingly, Taneba later compromises his moral principle in the course of executing the "Mairo Project;" probably due to the pressures in the city which negatively affect his moral standing, or perhaps because of his inherent failures as a human being. More than that, he abandons the "project" mid-stream following a youthful indiscretion on Mairo's part who goes dancing at night with a former prostitute colleague and following his inability or wilful refusal to forgive her. Consequently, he terminates their agreement and withdraws his financial and moral support for her; but the first step Taneba has taken towards saving Mairo turns out to be the most important step in her life and it culminates in self-recovery for her. Hence, Mairo bids prostitution a permanent goodbye and eventually attends a university while still living in the city.

Yellow is perhaps the most unfortunate character in *Alpha Song* because he appears to be trailed by ill-luck and misfortune even prior to his sojourning in the city. Yellow's life is a study in hardship, misery, unhappiness, long-suffering and endurance. As an individual, Yellow seems to be harmless, quiet and unobtrusive with an incredible willingness to always lend a hand wherever necessary. He is also favoured with a good sense of humour being almost clownish; but it appears Yellow is ignorant and gullible especially about the ways of the city. Born as an albino from which he derives his name, it is as if his skin pigmentation is enough to seal his destiny for the worst as his father promptly rejects him at birth because he "could not believe that it was he who had fathered an albino" (131). This disadvantage seems to have charted a negative fate for Yellow and he suffers throughout the novel, most times unduly.

However, Yellow appears to be one of the characters that survive best in the city for in addition to possessing a strong determination to overcome his unhappy circumstance, he seems also imbued with a strong capacity to endure suffering. He is an incurable optimist who refuses to yield to societal stigmatisation insisting on being properly integrated and accepted especially by the sophisticated residents of the city. For a man whose string of

maladies range from insomnia to lunacy, it takes extraordinary courage and tenacity not to be put down by stigmatisation and much more to become an employee in the service of those running the affairs of the city. Ironically however, the fact that Yellow, who has no more than a primary school certificate and who has "been both in prison and in a psychiatric hospital" (25), presents himself for an interview to become a traffic officer and gets the job also exposes the vagaries of the city and the dangers lurking around city inhabitants who may not be wary of the idiosyncrasies of agents at work in the city. It is instructive also that Yellow uses dishonest means to find his way into the traffic section of the Police force in the city:

> He had gone to the market for every sort of forged document known as "Oluwole" and obtained what he needed: a school testimonial, character testimonials and a letter from his traditional ruler certifying his citizenship (205).

The fact that a document can be forged in the city but can be accepted in the same city as having been purportedly issued by a traditional ruler in a village tends to affirm the notoriety of the city as an entity where absurdities thrive.

Certain features are identifiable as common trends in both *Invisible Chapters* and *Alpha Song*. Apart from the fact that both books examine what it means to live in the city, there is a genuine mingling of characters across social class in the two books such that even when the major characters are educated and can therefore be regarded as being on a higher social pedestal than the rest of the characters, the author permits real and genuine relationships to develop and flourish between and among all characters. In *Invisible Chapters*, although the major characters like Prinzi, Ashikodi and Haile have all gone through the university there is nevertheless nothing in the way they interact with other slum dwellers such as Rasaki, Segilola, Centigrade, Mama Badejo and others to suggest that the Prinzi group regard themselves as being superior or possessing any kind of advantage over others.

Similarly in *Alpha Song,* the protagonist who is also a university graduate relates with characters like Mairo, Yellow, Esther, Alonzo and many other illiterate characters in the novel on a level that betrays no class struggle amongst them. A corollary point is the absence of ethnicity or ethnic consideration in the ways characters run their affairs in the two novels. In *Invisible Chapters*, no one knows where Prinzi, Ashikodi, Haile, Segilola, Centigrade and indeed all the other characters come from and no one discusses it. Asampete, who seems obsessed with tracing her roots, ends up with mere conjectures; yet,

the love they all share, the spirit of communal living, the bond of friendship and genuine affection existing among them is palpable. Also in *Alpha Song*, the only character Nwosu 'favours' with a hint of ancestry is the protagonist, Taneba, who is said to have come from Kaiama Creek but no particular state or region of the country is mentioned and it is left for the reader to make guesses. Another character, Toshiba, is described as "a quarter-cast" (94) with roots in different countries that include Nigeria, China, the Philippines and Britain. Mairo is said to have been so named because she was born in the north, but no mention is made of her parents' ethnicity. Tamuno was abandoned at birth making his roots untraceable. Yellow grew up "in a place called Uzi Quarters …a middle town settlement beside a dying city" (128). The description is as vague as it is ambiguous leaving the reader completely clueless about Yellow's ancestry. As for the numerous girls Taneba encounters during his night sojourns, attempting to trace their origin is outright impossible because most of them discard their real names to adopt 'trade names' in the city; a character known to Taneba as Angel is generally "called Nameless because she gave a different name to whoever asked her for that information" (85).

The relegation of ethnicity and social class to the background in the daily lives of Nwosu's characters appears to be a deliberate design by the author to celebrate the city. Nwosu seems to be saying that notwithstanding the problems associated with city life, there is a distinct city ethic that is worthy of celebration.

Also common to both *Invisible Chapters* and *Alpha Song* is an expression of preference for the city over the village. Nwosu selects at least a character in each of the novels to illustrate his preference for the city. In each situation, the character feels bedevilled by a catalogue of woes in the city and resolves to relocate to the village in search of succour but finds the situation in the village to be far worse than what obtains in the city and returns to the city accordingly. The twice-widowed Mama Badejo in *Invisible Chapters* is lucky that she leaves the city for the village but returns to the city unscathed with a resolve never to leave the city again because she discovers the condition of living in the village is far worse than what obtains in the city. However, Yellow is not that lucky in *Alpha Song* as his attempt to return to his Uzi Quarters village gets catastrophic for after spending less than two weeks in the village, Yellow re-traces his steps back to Lagos in a most pathetic way:

> He looked as haggard as if he had made the almost four hundred – kilometre journey on foot. […] His eyes bespoke an intense energy that appeared to be above recognizing mere mortals. […] Faith

> arranged his transfer to a psychiatric hospital […]. And the gates of reality […] closed on Yellow (136 - 137).

It is instructive that Yellow not only finds a cure upon his return to the city, but he also picks a job thus signalling an end to his misery. Hence, when Taneba asks him after his recovery whether he will consider going back to the village, his answer is a quick retort: "God forbid! I don comot from Uzi final" (161).

Another common trend in the two books is the tendency of the characters to merely drift in the city. There does not seem to be any real purpose or meaning to their lives except to move the way the tide takes them – adrift. This worrisome trend is taken to a sorrowful climax in the life of the protagonist in *Alpha Song,* Taneba, whose only legacy to his son is a record of how he ran with the night.

There are also many features that distinguish *Invisible Chapters* from *Alpha Song* the most apparent of which is that *Invisible Chapters* deals with history but *Alpha Song* does not. Also, *Invisible Chapters* makes use of multiple subjects and the narration of events in the novel is done by omnipotent observer while *Alpha Song* has a single subject who also tells his own story. Closely related to the above point is that the concern of the author in *Invisible Chapters* is on the group – the survival of a group in the city whereas *Alpha Song* deals with how the individual struggles to survive in the city. In accordance with the author's design therefore, the crises and challenges needing resolutions and solutions are group and individual based respectively.

Invisible Chapters appears to be a more optimistic book than *Alpha Song.* There seems to be a suggestion that greater joy and fulfilment may accrue to city dwellers when challenges are brought to group level. However, this may tantamount to borrowing one of the greatest virtues of village life where the villagers' real joy is derived from communal living. It is significant that in *Alpha Song,* Yellow has to be helped by his friends who act like a family to him in the city to overcome insanity. In other words, extreme individuality may portend unhappiness, misery and finally destruction using loneliness as a veritable tool. It is worthy of note also that at the end of his reckless run with the night, Taneba comes to the realisation that "night life is … the universe of drifters" (166), and as an act of repentance, he returns to his birth place to perform what he describes as "a symbolic personal burial of his father by putting an owl in a coffin and saying a prayer for the dead (228)." This seems to be his final acceptance of the important role of the bond of kinship in the life of every individual including those residing in the city.

Also setting the novels apart is the author's peep into other cities in *Alpha Song* probably to establish the similarities and differences between Lagos and other cities of the world. Taneba and Faith live parts of their lives in New York, United States and Melbourne, Australia, respectively thereby permitting the reader a global view of cities and an opportunity to discover similarities and differences between Lagos and other world cities**.** *Invisible Chapters* focuses only on Lagos.

What is distinct, unique and special to Nwosu's treatment of the city in literature? Two qualities are easily noticeable. The first one is that Nwosu seems to be advocating the adoption of the village value of communal living in the city in order to make the city more liveable. However, he seems to be positing, very strongly, that such bond of communal living and kinship which should form the bedrock of city life should not be on the basis of ethnicity or social status. To a very large extent, the optimism that dominates the psyche of the characters in *Invisible Chapters* is a negation of the sordidness of their living condition. They seem to owe their happiness primarily to the knowledge that they have one another's shoulder to lean on despite the fact that they all come from different backgrounds which are never discussed in the novel apparently because such information is considered irrelevant to their existence. In the same vein, it can be argued that the lack of fulfilment that characterises Taneba's life in *Alpha Song* and which has its root in loneliness resulting in his decision to embrace night life is traceable to his decision to stand aloof in the city. Nwosu seems to be saying that if loneliness in the city can be overcome through meaningful engagement and interrelationship with fellow city dwellers, the tendency of the city to induce its dwellers into making unhelpful decision may be considerably lessened.

The second distinctive quality of Nwosu's work is what seems to be his position that Lagos is not worse than other cities of the world. The sojourn of the protagonist of *Alpha Song* in New York is very significant in illustrating this point. When Taneba's employer, Chief Stephens informs him of his elevation and transfer to New York, he confesses that "I should have been excited. I was not; I had a date with Lagos" (202). His resolve that "I had better lap up as much of the Lagos night life as I could" (203), is indicative of an assumption that perhaps, Lagos is the most permissive city in the world. Other utterances such as "perhaps, I should think seriously of marriage…" (203) further suggest an expectation that New York may be a less bustling city than Lagos. However, upon his arrival in New York, Taneba finds the city to be a "grand cosmopolitan riot" (225). Not only that, he soon discovers that many of the night clubs in New York are even more

sophisticated than the night clubs he patronised back in Lagos and that the night clubs in New York are "strip dance clubs" (225). He is also amazed at the large number of young girls that patronise night clubs in New York that he "began to suspect that perhaps every young woman in America …took her turn at one club or the other" (225). In other words, Taneba finds New York City to be even more permissive than Lagos. Given his antecedents, it is not surprising that Taneba is thrilled by his findings. His excitement knows no bounds and he immediately begins to avail himself of what appears to him to be a fresh opportunity to 'run with the night' until he gets himself into the trouble that earns him a two-year jail sentence for touching a strip dancer.

The import of Taneba's experience in New York seems to be that waywardness, which can be taken as representative of other known vices of Lagos, may not be an exclusive ailment of Lagos city. In other words, other cities of the world are no less permissive or easier to live in than Lagos; what probably separates Lagos from some of these other cities are the laws that regulate the behaviour of residents in these other cities which are either different from or non-existent in Lagos.

Above all other consideration, the personal choices the individual makes in the city appears to be the ultimate factor that shapes the individual's destiny in the city. Pedro Juan Soto (1981), insists that she detests the ghettos of New York because they are a degeneration of Howells' romantic idea; but Maik Nwosu seems to be saying especially in *Invisible Chapters* that whether in the slums of Lagos, symbolised by the Old Maroko, its semi-slums, represented by the New Maroko or in the government reserved areas such as New Queenstown, the city is liveable because it possesses an inherent ethic that is unique, distinct and phenomenal.

In the final analysis, textual analysis of the work of contemporary Nigerian fiction writers on the city, represented in this work by Nwosu's two novels has revealed that contemporary Nigerian fiction writers acknowledge that the city is a difficult place to live in especially in view of its numerous negative characteristics such as high cost of living, absence or inadequate social infrastructures, unhealthy competition and loneliness among several attributes of the city. Contemporary Nigerian writers of fiction on the city, like their older counterparts, are also worried and sad about the tendency of the city to very easily pre-dispose its inhabitants to making unhelpful decisions in the city. However, contemporary writers depart from the old generation writers in the way they privilege the

city as a metaphor for cultural rootlessness and especially in their insistence on celebrating it as the distinct city ethic and not lamenting it. Contemporary Nigerian fiction writers on the city seem to have embraced the postmodernist intervention in theory making about the city which counsels the celebration of whatever that is found in the city and using prevalent specific situations to understand and assess particular circumstances and characters in the city rather than passing judgment or reaching conclusion based on established universal truth.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AND THE CITY: BUCHI EMECHETA AND SEFI ATTA

> I looked forward to seeing the city controlled by a goddess where […] women are assigned a place to function […] and their voice is heard, as they are consulted in the scheme of things. (Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, *Juju Fission*, 2007).

Having examined the perspectives and attitudes of the old and contemporary Nigerian male novelists to the city, it is pertinent also to look at the way their female counterparts view and treat the city in their works. To understand the women writers' view on how the city affects its residents or the way the city is constantly being moulded and re-moulded by its inhabitants, it may be useful to begin with an understanding of the women's movement that has become a global phenomenon – feminism. If we understand global feminism and African feminism in particular, it will illuminate our quest to discovering whether or not women authors write differently about the city. It will also guide our expectation from Nigerian women writers on the city.

Global feminism has a broad perception to its concept but in an effort to outline the main form and features of feminism, Susan James (2000, 576) characterises it as being grounded on the belief that "women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified." She notes however that there are many interpretations of women and their oppression under the umbrella of this general characterisation such that it may be a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political programme (James, 2000: 576). Mary Klages (2006, 91) traces the concern of women "since the Middle Ages" as to "whether gender is biological or cultural, whether it is innate and natural and God-given, or whether it is socially constructed and therefore mutable." She observes that most feminists prefer to believe that gender is a social construct, that it is "variable, mutable and not

necessarily tied to anatomical or genetic determinants" (Klages, 2006: 91). As an intellectual commitment, feminism can be viewed as a quest for justice for women in all forms providing a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural and political phenomena. Topics often examined by feminists and feminist concerns include the body, the family, class and work, disability, globalisation, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex, work, sexuality, violence, and abortion among others. Although feminism and women's movement worldwide seem to concern themselves with the same grand themes, there are however great differences in the focus and implication of these themes between the western and the African women on a number of levels.

First, African feminists believe that while the western feminists are busy harvesting the fruits of capitalism and a global economy, the women in Africa are often confronted with poverty, terrible labour conditions, faulty education and health care. Two, differences in colour, race, ethnicity and cultural values are also the inspiration for specific forms of African feminism as these factors have given rise (and still do) to serious conflicts. So, while African women's activism cannot be seen differently from the global context of repression and exploitation of women, African women may take wholly different stands on abortion, genital mutilation, infanticide, women's seclusion, polygamy and homosexuality among others.

Thus, African and western women's movements often have a wide gap to bridge particularly because African women traditionally fulfil a greater multitude of roles than women in other continents do. It is an established fact that Africa has a long and unique tradition of female leaders such as queens, chiefs, political and religious leaders. In Nigeria for instance, there are notable women figures like Queen Amina, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margret Ekpo among others. Some (not all) African cultures also have a tradition of double gender organisation that permit women to participate as members of a ritual or professional organisation, a peer group or a gender-specific organisation, the existence of female leadership like the regency tradition in Akure. This does not however imply that individual ordinary women have equal rights. Thus, the absence of an egalitarian or feminist society in Africa provides an impetus for the African women movement that culminated in African feminism. But beyond the quest for an egalitarian society by the African women, the women's movement in Africa is believed to have been strongly influenced and shaped by the activism against colonial rule and racist ideologies.

It seems therefore that the aim of African women writers is not so much to deconstruct their male counterparts but to provide fresh perspectives on a wide range of issues, which are either being ignored by the men or are being treated in half measures. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi offers a succinct account of this mission when she asserts that African women are:

> [...] concerned with the state of the family, women, nation and the continent, the writers, in a post colonial, recuperative effort, transplant women to participate in operating the system. Their intention is for women's contribution to be heeded in governance (*Juju Fission*, 2007:7).

Even from the global perspective, the focus of this chapter is on the feminism of the 1980s, which shifts its attention from attacking male versions of the world to concentrating on exploring the nature of the female world and outlook. Not a few scholars and critics have found it convenient to view global feminism as occurring in "waves." On this "wave" model therefore, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid 19th century (i.e., from the 1850s) until the 1920s will count as the "first wave" feminism. Feminism reportedly waned between the two World Wars but was "revived" in the late 1960s and the early 1970s as "second wave" feminism. The "second wave" feminism went beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across the board including education, the workplace and home. In other words, its emphasis was on practical concerns with the rights of women in contemporary societies. Toril Moi (1987) however prefers to regard the "second wave" feminism as "a matter of biology." Then, in the 1980s, the "third wave" feminism emerged with emphasis on the female "identity." This "wave" of feminism seeks to reconstruct the lost or suppressed records of female experience. This is the focus of this chapter in relation to the city.

In line with this approach, the pertinent issue this chapter seeks to address is to determine whether women authors write differently about the city; and if they do, to find out what is different or what is new? It may be helpful also to outline a set of expectations from the selected Nigerian women novelists – Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta – particularly against the background of the identified concerns of African feminists or African women writers. The feminist theory has been described as post-modern not only because it challenges the paradigms and intellectual premises of western thought but also because it often proposes frequent interventions and attempts to offer alternative positions to change the social order. Hence, Okonjo Ogunyemi (2007:85) insists that "African women novelists… will continue

to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge that can bring about behaviour modification by Africans." According to her,

> The loss of the child, the insatiable desire for children, emotional, political and economic colonization by one's male kin, outsiders, and a few well-placed women form the topics of the thematic core of novels written by African women (85).

If Okonjo Ogunyemi's position is acceptable as a representative voice of the Nigerian women novelists, then the expectations from the city books of Emecheta and Atta may include, although may not be limited to, the following:

- ~~a~~ thematic preoccupation with 'personal matters' and the family in addition to political and economic matters;
- a concentration on self (women) through the use of heroines rather than heroes;
- a depiction of heroines as great achievers not as prostitutes or never-do-wells who must cling to the man in order to survive;
- a fluidity of ideas and language rather than rigidity or stereotyping of characterisation;
- a rejection of physical weakness as being bad or physical strength as being good and an insistence on judging each quality on its own merit ; and
- a tendency to be insistent in approach.

Set in pre-independence Nigeria, *The Joys of Motherhood* tells the pathetic story of a young woman from the West of the Niger, Nnu Ego, who is born and raised in the countryside but who relocates to Lagos to join her husband in a second marriage after an unsuccessful first marriage in the village. The challenges confronting Nnu Ego on arrival in Lagos are numerous. First, her marriage is contracted before she meets her would-be husband and without her having a prior knowledge of him. Hence, she arrives in the city to the shock of having to accept a man she considers far below her standard in terms of physical attractiveness. Also, Nnaife, her new husband, holds a demeaning employment as a laundry man to a white couple in the city and his duties include washing a woman's undergarments. These and many more shocking discoveries in the city initially constitute a

huge challenge to Nnu Ego who is horrified at discovering that unlike in the countryside where men engage in the 'dignified' vocation of tilling the soil and reaping bountiful harvests to the pride and admiration of their women, the men in the city, especially the uneducated ones, engage in degrading jobs such as washing clothes, cooking and tendering the gardens of their white masters.

In spite of her reluctance however, she accepts her marriage thereby agreeing to settle down to being a city dweller particularly because of the expectation the new marriage holds for her, that of procreation and eventually reaping all the joys of motherhood. Greater challenges however await Emecheta's heroine as she settles down to city life for she soon finds out, for instance, that she will need to engage in some form of vocation or trading to supplement her husband's meagre income since what the supposed head of the family receives as salary is not sufficient to sustain the family. Worse still, unlike in the village where there are numerous friendly relatives and friends in whose care a woman can leave her child whenever the need arises, impersonality and individuality characterise city life and no one seems to be interested in the affairs or well-being of others. Hence, Nnu Ego is left with no option but to bear her child on her back on her daily hawking activities, a situation that leads to the sudden death of her first child in the city, the child she has longed for and for whose sake she has put herself through untold hardship and suffering in the city.

Although she overcomes this and many other initial challenges, gives birth to many children in the city and successfully raises them also in the city – seven in all, the stress and strains of city life prevent her from being happy and fulfilled. She battles to come to terms with the demands of a city which seems to have strange values. She is unable to understand the city ethic, yet, she is determined to struggle to survive in the city. She also labours hard to bring up her children to appreciate some of the values of the countryside notwithstanding the fact that they are being brought up in the city. Nnu Ego wants her children to embrace, uphold and cherish the bond of family kinship, sharing with, caring for and being one another's keeper. Unfortunately however, these values seem to be at variance with the values prevalent in the city and she fails to inculcate these values in her children most of whom demonstrate a preference for the city ways.

As her children grow and mature therefore, Nnu Ego discovers that they are wont to follow the path of city folks, for they are first of all children of the city. Hence, her

children choose freedom; they choose to put self before others, to disregard the wishes and advice of their parents and to obey and follow the dictates of the city in the determination of what constitutes success as well as how to achieve it. Her husband does not fare better in the city also apparently due to lack of understanding of city ways. He falls afoul of the law and bags a five-year jail term over a matter that would have been resolved amicably in a village setting.

Finally, with her husband clamped in prison, her first son far away in America and totally incommunicado with his parents, the city loses its appeal to Nnu Ego forcing her to return to the countryside, where she again fails to be re-integrated into the village setting because she is no longer considered to be a part of it. In the reckoning of her relatives and in-laws in the village, Nnu Ego has become a city woman whose ways are as strange as those of the city. She is completely misunderstood and roundly misjudged. Among other perceived misdemeanours, Nnu Ego is blamed for the 'misconduct' of her children, one of whom has the effrontery to marry from a different tribe. She is held responsible also for the misfortune of her husband. She is despised, hated, alienated and rejected, especially by her in-laws who banish her from her matrimonial home. Her banishment from her husband's household turns out to be the biggest of the calamities that befall her on her return to the village and she succumbs to despondency, despair and finally, death without reaping the long sought-after joys of motherhood.

Everything Good Will Come is about the different phases in the life of a Nigerian woman from the South West spanning twenty-four (24) years (1971 - 1995), nine of which are spent in England and the remaining fifteen (15) spent in the city of Lagos. The novel opens when the heroine, Enitan Taiwo, is eleven years old and is living what may seem to be a privileged life as the only surviving child of a lawyer father and a chartered secretary mother. In spite of her privileged upbringing however, Enitan is an unhappy adolescent for many reasons. First, being an only child means that she has no siblings to play and interact with thereby making her childhood utterly boring. Two, her parents live an elitist lifestyle with a standoffish attitude; they reside in a privileged neighbourhood in the city and do not interact with their neighbours. Worse still, her parents' marital life is characterised by constant squabbles which eventually culminate in a divorce.

From early childhood, therefore, Enitan is made to take unsolicited lessons in marital unhappiness which colours her perception of the male-female relationship in a significant

way and plays a negative role in her adult life to the extent that she does not appear to have sufficient regard for the institution of marriage. In spite of her parents' rigid principle regarding non-interaction with neighbours and notwithstanding their stern warning to little Enitan not to be seen with anyone outside her home, she gets a chance encounter with a neighbour's child, a girl of her age, Sheri Bakare, shortly before she goes into a boarding house to commence her secondary school education and Sheri inducts her into city life. Sheri can also be regarded as her anchor and teacher in the ways of the city. Although Sheri is a young girl of the heroine's age, she is thoroughly city bred, without norm and with eyes on the glitz and frills of the city. Hence, Enitan's association with her brings with it lots of fun and excitement, especially for the hitherto quiet and almost melancholic Enitan. Not too long after, however, one of their secret adventures turns into a misadventure as Sheri is raped and Enitan incurs the wrath of her parents who immediately send her to England in order to prevent her from further associating with Sheri.

In England, the heroine completes her secondary school education, goes on to study law, qualifies as a lawyer and returns to Lagos for the National Youth Service Corps Programme. Back in Lagos and now a full grown woman of twenty-five years old, the heroine has a stint at her father's law chambers, does a bit of banking job in addition to acquiring some experience as a public prosecutor in the Federal Ministry of Justice. Her love life also blossoms, though not without hitches, and she finally gets married to Niyi Franco.

However, rather than settle down to a lifetime of marital bliss and fulfilment, Enitan takes on the garb of an idealist and activist propelled by a series of events in the lives of people close to her as well as the disturbing political situation in the country. Prominent among the domestic issues that are of concern to her is the separation of her parents which although takes place while she is still studying in England, becomes more manifest on her return to Lagos. There is also the issue of Sheri's liaison with an Army Brigadier whom Enitan resents for seemingly undermining Sheri's individuality and curtailing her economic independence. In addition to these, the heroine is unhappy about what she considers to be her husband's rigid and limited expectations of her as a wife. She takes particular exception to her husband and his family constantly reminding her of her duties in the kitchen, the need for her to maintain a 'low profile' as a wife and mother, to stay quiet and show neither interest nor concern about the plight of people around her and to concentrate and channel all her energy towards looking after her immediate family.

Other issues that fan the embers of her activism are the political incarceration of her father for granting a press interview to advocate the release of his detained social critic client, the travails of a woman journalist in the hands of the state security agents and the general atmosphere of fear and insecurity that pervades the country in the era of military dictatorship. Perhaps what Enitan finds most disturbing and because of which she finally decides not to remain passive begins with the discovery of her father's disloyalty to her mother long before their separation and divorce as evidenced by her sudden discovery of the existence of a secret sibling, a son, who is only four years younger than her.

The most distressing of all the heroine's experiences however appears to be the sudden death of her mother whose death is not discovered for over twenty-four hours because she has been living alone and has been very lonely and unhappy; she has died a miserable death. These and other events in the novel, which the heroine perceives as being capable of putting the women at a disadvantage if they do not use the privilege of living in the city to question and challenge them, ultimately lead to her decision not to heed her husband's counsel and she tells him firmly "I'm not the same as I used to be" (330). She thereafter accepts to lead an all-women Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to canvass and press for the release of detainees, especially their relations and women journalists.

However, bearing in mind that her husband forbids her from using their matrimonial home as a venue for their meetings, Enitan moves out of her matrimonial home and returns to her late mother's house thus signalling the jettisoning of her marriage in favour of life as a single mother to her newly born daughter, Yimika. The novel ends on an unrepentantly idealistic note with the heroine anchoring her optimism in her strong conviction that "freedom was never intended to be sweet" and that "it was a responsibility from the onset, for a … person, to fight for, and to hold on to" (334).

Swallow is another significant novel to this study. It can be divided into two parts. The first part can be taken as capturing the life and times of the protagonist in the city, while the second may be viewed as representing her experiences in the countryside, thereby offering the reader a balanced view of both settings. On the whole, *Swallow* tells the story of an averagely educated and relatively young Nigeria woman, Tolani Ajao, who sojourns in Lagos to earn a living but who soon finds out that earning an honest living in a city like Lagos can be more difficult than she had anticipated because "Lagos had the worst of city life" (170).

Armed with a Diploma Certificate in Secretarial Studies from a polytechnic and now employed as secretary by the Federal Community Bank in Lagos, Tolani's dream of becoming a happy city dweller seems accomplished but it turns out to be a life dogged by unimaginable challenges. First, she discovers that the cost of living in the city is prohibitive. Hence, she has to share a flat with a female colleague, also a spinster working in the same bank with her because neither of them can afford a separate apartment. In addition to the challenges of sharing an apartment with a hitherto strange person from a completely different background, world view and idiosyncrasies, Tolani finds that the rent nevertheless takes as much as half of their pay thus making their living very precarious. As a result of the high cost of living in the city, their feeding pattern consists of buying fried yams on their way to work in the morning which they normally eat from newspaper wrappings and which serves as their breakfast. In the afternoon, they buy and eat only groundnuts until evening when they return home from work before they manage to eat the only decent meal of the day which is also mostly in the form of yam pottage.

Another problem that confronts Tolani in the city is the chaotic transportation system which hampers free movement of residents from one point to the other. Consequently, she leaves home as early as 5 o'clock every morning in order to be able to report for work at 8 o'clock and returning home is no less difficult. Besides, the daily journeys carry a lot of risks including death through accident. Worst of all, Tolani and her flatmate and colleague, Rose, are already in their late 20s, and like all women of their age, they not only consider themselves ripe enough for marriage but are also desperate to 'settle down' each with a man of her dreams.

Unfortunately however, there appears to be only two types of men in Lagos. In the first group are men who are sincere, loyal, forthright, hardworking, focused and struggling to earn an honest living in the city and ready to 'settle down' just like the girls but who are constrained by the demands, limitations and vagaries of the city and are unable to actualise their dreams. In the second group are men who beat, steal, use, kill, or waste women's time without remorse. The tragedy of the spinster living in the city, in the heroine's view, is that there is no way for her and her fellow desperate spinsters to know the difference by merely looking at the men in the city since they all appear promising and serious on the surface. The heroine gets involved in a relationship with a man in the first category of men while her flatmate, Rose, gets entangled with a man in the second category. Either way, their lives appear jinxed as marriage may elude both girls going by the dictates of the city. Not

even Tolani's desperate move of surrendering her life savings to her boyfriend, Sanwo, to enable him to pay her dowry yields a positive result. Nevertheless, Tolani continues to weather the storm in the city amidst mounting pressures. She learns to cope with the rigours of city life without compromising her ideals and she is even determined to trust her boyfriend and wait for as long as it may take him to find his feet in the city and marry her.

However, a series of unhappy events in the novel truncates her plans and leaves her utterly confused. Her relationship with Sanwo suddenly comes crashing consequent upon Sanwo's unsuccessful attempt at securing financial autonomy through a business deal with a supposed friend. It is the same business arrangement to which Tolani has contributed her entire life savings. Added to the heroine's misery in the city is the undeserved suspension she gets from her place of employment following her refusal to yield to her randy boss' sexual overtures. Now totally overwhelmed by challenges she is unable to deal with in the city, Tolani decides to undertake a symbolic journey to her birth place, Makoku, ostensibly to unravel the mystery surrounding her paternity.

Before she embarks on the journey which she plans to be a mere holiday, the news of the sudden death of her colleague and flatmate, Rose, through a "bag burst" on her way to England as a drug courier comes hitting her like a thunderbolt. The heroine eventually undertakes the journey but while still in the village, Sanwo brings the news of the termination of her appointment thereby ending the novel on a note of confusion. Tolani is confused and without a clear direction at the end of the novel. She does not know what to make of her life, her family history, her career if she still has one, her relationship with Sanwo if they still have a relationship and whether she should make the village her permanent place of abode. Thus, in *Swallow*, the city exerts so much pressure on women such that they are driven to confusion, misery and even death.

One of the major concerns of Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* appears to be the plight of the urban poor. As a growing child in the village and up to her maturity to a young maiden, the heroine's circumstances are clearly above average. As a love child and daughter of a prominent chief in the village, Nnu Ego lacks neither material comfort nor the love and affection of her parents.

However, her village happiness and prosperity fail to have a positive impact on her life in the city. As a wife and mother dwelling in the large city of Lagos, life is a nightmare for Nnu Ego as poverty and deprivation become her lot and that of her entire household.

Emecheta seems to be saying that it takes a lot more to be comfortable in the city than in the countryside and this situation confers a poor status on many city dwellers whose fortunes and status would have been a lot better were they to be in the village. Hence, for Nnu Ego, poverty creates ingenuity in her as she battles for her family's survival, trying her hands on one form of trading or another such as selling cigarettes, matches and fire wood. Yet, her lot and that of her family fail to improve significantly. Instead, their condition grows from bad to worse as they relocate from the railway quarters which is overgrown with weeds to a single "airless room" and then to "a mud house where there was no running tap water" (188). Their children, malnourished and poorly raised, are not spared the agony being experienced by their parents. Child labour becomes the only option for the family's survival and the children are frequently taken out of school to hawk wares and generally assist in the struggle for survival. The result is that out of seven children, only two have the benefit of education with the second one achieving it largely through self-effort.

Urban poverty has also engaged the attention of other Nigerian novelists who have expressed worry that the problem seems to be intractable in the city. In this regard, Nnu Ego's family is comparable to the family of Odemudia and wife, Adisa, in Festus Iyayi's *Violence* as well as that of Azaro's parents in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. In *Violence*, for example, Adisa describes the family's situation as "a situation of always wanting" (133). So pathetic is their living condition in the city that Odemudia and his friends resort to selling pints of their precious blood in order to raise money to provide food for their families. This step only results in aggravated poverty, hunger and disease. Odemudia's wife also loses the will for endurance and surrenders her body to a rich but unsympathetic man so as to get money to settle her husband's hospital expenses. Similarly in *The Famished Road*, Azaro regularly laments the hardship being experienced by his parents:

> Dad […] worked very hard and when I saw him on Sundays he seemed to be in agony. Dad worked hard carrying heavy loads at the garage and market places and he earned very little money. Out of what he earned he paid the creditors […] and out of what was left, we could barely manage to pay the rent and eat (*The Famished Road*: 78).

Urban poverty is poignant and serious, these writers appear to be saying but they do not seem to think that there is a solution in sight going by the events in the novels. In spite of their worry and concern about poverty in the city however, it is interesting to note that none of them appear to think that abandoning the city or returning to the countryside is a

preferred option. In *The Famished Road***,** city life seems to be moving on only in circles. There are no solutions yet to the pervasive poverty in the city but there is also no contemplation of returning to the village. In fact, through Azaro, the reader gains access to the thinking of his mother:

> She sighed and I knew that in spite of everything she would carry on hawking. Her sigh was full of despair, but at the bottom of her lungs, at the depth of her breath's expulsion, there was also hope (93).

In *Violence***,** in spite of the poverty and untold hardship being experienced by the protagonist, the narrator's position is unmistakable.

> In the villages, most people died in middle age, between the ages of thirty-five and forty years. They were cut down swiftly, mercilessly and without warning. As the women took over the farms the men had farmed, village life became harder still and malnutrition and disease increased (*Violence***:** 71).

Similarly, Maik Nwosu makes no pretences about his preference for the city in *Invisible Chapters***.** Using one of his characters to demonstrate his preference for the city, the poverty-stricken and twice-widowed Mama Badejo runs to the village after what she regards as a failed attempt to overcome urban poverty. However, she not only realises that the village is not better than the city, she returns to the city with a firm declaration to henceforth make the city her permanent place of habitation. It is little wonder therefore that in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the heroine's return to the village results in her sudden and untimely death. Plagued by acute poverty and a feeling of helplessness, Nnu Ego contemplates abandoning the city several times in the novel but manages to overcome the pressure until it finally gets to a point she considers unbearable especially following her husband's incarceration and her first son's perceived insensitivity to the family's plight. She loses the will to go on struggling in the city; "she could not afford their rent and she had no courage to start struggling all over again" (226). She therefore decides that returning to the village has become unavoidable.

Unfortunately for her, she fails to receive the warmth and love she desperately needs resulting in her "going downhill very fast." "Her senses started to give way" not long after her return to the village (224). Lonely, rejected and totally uncared for, she takes to wandering in the village and it is after one of such wanderings that she lies down on the road one night where she dies a lonely and miserable death. It is instructive that even her husband who still has his life at the end of the novel and who also abandons the city

and returns to the village does so 'a broken man.' Sadly, there seems to be no help in sight yet for the urban poor going by what seems to be the submissions of the novelists.

Apart from urban poverty, another issue that runs through *The Joys of Motherhood* is the latitude which women who live in the city tend to have. Events in the novel clearly show that women in the city, whether married or not, are able to assert themselves better on account of the city freedom. From the heroine to her twin daughter and her co-wife, the women in the novel all seem to be celebrating their city-given freedom. It is unlikely for instance, that Nnu Ego would have had the audacity to retaliate when being beaten by her husband; but "Nnu Ego lifted the head of the broom and gave Nnaife a blow on his shoulder" (91) during one of their fights. Nnaife also recognises that Nnu Ego is only taking advantage of their living in the city: "Who is your father that you can come here and beat me, just because we are far away from anywhere?" (91).

What may be described as cultural permissiveness in the city is also a veritable weapon of liberation not only for Nnu Ego but also for other women in the novel. Adaku, Nnaife's wife by inheritance, takes advantage of her coming to live in the city to assert her independence by abandoning her unhappy marriage to Nnaife and moving out of her matrimonial home to live as a single parent. Thoroughly frustrated by her inability to produce male children as demanded by village tradition, Adaku embraces what appears to be the nonchalant attitude and disposition of the city. She gets as daring as announcing her readiness to join the prostitution trade to show that she is no longer tied down by village beliefs and values.

Perhaps, the most daring of the women is Kehinde, one of the heroine's twin daughters who marries outside her ethnic nationality despite her parents' protestations. Kehinde not only ignores her parents' opposition to her intended marriage, she goes ahead to get pregnant for her man and leaves her parents unannounced to live with the family of her Yoruba husband while her father languishes in prison having been found guilty of unlawfully attacking his would-be in-laws. Indeed, the city air gives freedom to Emecheta's female characters in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

However, to be able to truly make use of the freedom which the city offers women, Emecheta seems to be insisting that women in the city must be able to make financial contribution to the running of the family in the city setting. Unlike in the village setting where the women are not required, as a necessity, to have visible means of livelihood

beyond assisting their husbands on the farm; women in the city have significant and even crucial economic roles to play, if the family must survive in Emecheta's city.

Two reasons appear to make this demand compelling. The first is that oftentimes, the man in the city, especially the urban poor, earns so little and the cost of living is so high that except his wife works or trades to augment the man's income, the family may not be able to stay afloat. Two, the vagaries of the city frequently take the man out of the matrimonial home sometimes for long periods of time thereby compelling the woman to take charge of crucial family affairs including feeding and payment of house rent and children's school fees among others. Throughout the novel, the heroine's husband, Nnaife, is not stable at the home front. At a point, he is conscripted into the army and taken away to some unknown countries for as long as four years. At other times, he is hopping from the city to the village in search of an inherited or new wife. He is not always around. During these periods, Nnu Ego works tirelessly to feed the family, pay the children's school fees, the house rent and generally prevent the family from disintegrating. She does all these alone without the support of relatives as would have been the case in a village setting.

It seems, therefore, that as much as the city grants the women a lot of liberty to proclaim their relevance and assert their independence, it also imposes a high degree of responsibility, if not burden, on them.

Writing more than twenty-five years later, Atta seems to be in agreement with Emecheta's position and even takes the issue of the opportunity the city gives women to assert themselves to an elevated level. In *Everything Good Will Come,* Atta's heroine treats the city's freedom as an asset and demonstrates how women who are not economically independent in the city only make themselves vulnerable not only to male domination and oppression, but also to poverty and misery. Atta seems to be insisting that women in the city must necessarily hold careers so as not to be vulnerable or slavish to men. The heroine's mother, Arin, impliedly has a fulfilling career as a Chartered Secretary prior to her marriage but she gives up her thriving career upon her marriage and begins a life of total dependency on her husband who turns out to be incapable of meeting her marital expectations from the emotional perspective culminating in a divorce. By the time Arin realises that there is no longer a man in her life on whom she will depend for her feeding and other necessities of life, it is already

too late for her to find her rhythm on the economic level and she spends the rest of her life in misery as she constantly worries about her sustenance.

Similarly, the heroine's friend, Sheri, despite having a university education and even being a former beauty queen, initially chooses to depend on a polygamous Army Brigadier as his mistress for her maintenance thereby lowering her sense of self worth in addition to almost turning herself into his slave:

> I even take care of Ibrahim. Since morning, I'm cooking. He may not show up, and this won't be the first time. …I have to tie my head up when I go out.. …He's a strict Muslim (105).

Like Arin who cannot afford to pay for an apartment of her own for which reason she lives in her former husband's house and has to enlist the help of her daughter to make her ex-husband relinquish the house to her, Sheri's house rent is being paid by her brigadier boyfriend and she believes she must continue to serve and wait upon the man because, according to her, she cannot afford to pay her rent. Atta demonstrates her total rejection of the notion of the inability of the woman to survive economically on her own submitting that the condition in the city does not permit the modern woman to be docile. Hence, events in the novel show the heroine's friend, Sheri, with Enitan's advice and support standing up to confront, even in a physical combat, her brigadier boyfriend in order to free herself from the slavish life she had previously willingly put herself. Sheri thereafter moves out of the apartment the brigadier rented for her. She relocates first to her family house from where she is able to pay the rent for her own apartment having successfully established herself as a restaurateur and later as founder of a charity organisation.

The issue of the economic emancipation of the woman which dwelling in the city not only makes possible but practically insists upon through a series of life-changing experiences for the city woman seems to be the core of Atta's quest in the novel. Through the heroine, Atta uses events in the novel to demonstrate her total commitment to the realisation of her ideals insisting through Enitan that:

> As far back as my grandmother's generation we'd been getting degrees and holding careers. My mother's generation were the pioneer professionals. We, their daughters, were expected to continue.
>
> […] The expectation of subordination bothered me […] I was ready to tear every notion they had about women. […] I would not let go until I was heard (190,191, 204).

Deliberately, it seems therefore, that the author makes a symbolic use of the kitchen in the novel as a place where not only women but also men should be seen regularly. Hence,

several times in the novel, Enitan either refuses to go into the kitchen to cook or insists on also having her husband or other people join her there. Remarks such as: "Isn't the kitchen the loneliest room? (187). Why can't you go to the kitchen? ...Will a snake bite your leg? (191) How can I decide what to do about my father from a kitchen?" (255) are indicative of the author's insistence that the woman living in the city may no longer be comparable to her counterpart in the countryside.

However, there is an insinuation in the novel to the effect that the high cost of living in the city including the exorbitant amount often demanded by city landlords tends to place women at the economic mercy of men. Also, the insensitivity and meanness of private employers of labour who are mostly men, is identified as a major factor limiting the economic capability of women living in the city. The heroine experiences this problem when she returns from England and is working at her father's law chamber where she discovers, to her dismay, that the salary her father pays his employees is in no way commensurate with the economic dictates of the city. She has to live with her father because what he pays her as salary is grossly insufficient for her to rent an apartment of her own. Also, her decision to move out of her matrimonial home at the end of the novel may have created an accommodation challenge if her mother's house, which is originally her father's, had not been vacant as a result of the death of her mother.

Notwithstanding this and many more challenges confronting the female city dweller, Atta seems to strongly reject the familiar traditional stereotype of associating fear with the female gender while courage is believed to be the exclusive attribute or characteristic of the male. Hence, in Atta's city, women, both old and young, can hold their own, demonstrate courage and astuteness whenever the need arises. Alhaja, the grandmother of the heroine's friend in the novel, is one of such women. There is no indication in the novel that the old woman had a formal education, not even a vocational training. Yet, Alhaja is portrayed in the novel as an enigma, a courageous and fearless woman who uses her powers, physical and spiritual, to nurture and protect her offspring up to the third generation:

> A woman widowed in her thirties, Alhaja headed a market women's union and earned enough to educate her children overseas. (162).

Similarly, Enitan's utterances, conduct and the decisions she makes in the novel leave the reader in no doubt that she is fearless and courageous. She encourages her friend to

terminate her unfulfilling romance with her boyfriend assuring her of her ability to survive on her own effort. She walks out on her own two-timing lover without a backward glance despite her love for him and the fact that she desperately needs an emotional support at the time to assist her cope with the shock of her father's betrayal. Even more importantly, she accepts to lead a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) through which she intends to canvass and advocate the release of political detainees including her father. This is after she has had an unpleasant encounter with the Nigerian prison system, having been 'mistakenly' locked up in an overcrowded cell. It is an ugly incident that nearly causes her the miscarriage of her long-sought pregnancy but she proves to be courageous enough not to allow her unpleasant experience deter or scare her from pursuing what she believes is a worthwhile goal. Hence, Kehinde and Mbipom's (2011:67) submission is that the primary theme of *Everthing Good Will Come* reflects Atta's desire to project the woman as a survivor of the harshest conditions, vicissitudes and hurdles.

Perhaps, Atta takes the new found courage and fearlessness of the modern woman living in the city almost to a controversial level when, following the refusal of the heroine's husband to allow her to use their matrimonial home as venue for the NGO meeting, Enitan moves out and abandons her marriage without considering not just the financial but also the psychological responsibility and implication of raising the child without the father. Symbolically however, she moves out on the day of the child's christening, thereby negating the traditional view of the woman as being fearful. A view so embedded in the psyche of Enitan's father to the extent that he regularly refers to his friend's constant fear as being like that of a woman: "He is afraid like woman" (199). Enitan insists that she recognises the consequences of her decision to live apart from her husband which she says include the reality "that there were bills to pay alone" (334), maintaining however that she is not afraid to face this and other challenges because, according to her, "freedom is never intended to be sweet" (334).

The difficult and often unattainable standard of success or achievement which the city appears to always set for its inhabitants is a source of worry to Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood*. It is as if once immigrants arrive in the city, they begin to view themselves as being luckier if not more fortunate than their counterparts in the countryside. It seems also that they then set for themselves or the city sets for them, a certain standard of achievement to distinguish them from the rural folks. While this problem may not have been very apparent in the lives of the heroine and her husband Nnaife, it is quite glaring in

the life of their first son Oshiaju who is determined to live above the standard of his parents even if he has to make them unhappy in the process. It is noteworthy also that the tendency and desire of city dwellers to aim high in the city usually begins with a quiet ambition, then it assumes a certain degree of determination and gradually turns into an obsession thus leading them to take desperate, regrettable, and sometimes catastrophic steps in order for them to achieve their set goals. The reader encounters this pre-occupation in *No Longer At Ease* where the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, goes as far as taking bribes so as to retain his membership of an exclusive elite club "whose members greet one another with 'how's the car behaving'" (90). The same issue is of concern to Ekwensi in *People of the City* where the author takes the reader into the inner recesses of the mind of the protagonist, Amusa Sango:

> Sango's one desire in this city was […] to forge ahead […] Beneath his gay exterior lay a nature serious and determined to carve for itself a place of renown in this city of opportunities (3).

While it seems legitimate and normal for city dwellers, like all other human beings elsewhere in the world to aspire to greatness, there appears to be a common opinion among many Nigerian novelists, men and women, that city dwellers tend to pursue their goals with a desperation that often leaves them dissatisfied with their modest achievement thereby propelling them to aim unrealistically higher until such a point that they become disillusioned or utterly destroyed. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Oshiaju's ambition destroys the lives of his parents. "What help can one give with only twelve pounds a month?" (191) He questions his younger brother, Adim, who has admonished him to rise up to the responsibility of caring for their ailing parents. Oshiaju wants to go higher in his educational pursuit without regard for the needs and wishes of his parents. "I don't think I will be greater than any boy in my class" (193), he once tells his mother because, as far as he is concerned, his measurement of success is the standard set by his city mates behind whom he must not lag even if his parents have to die of starvation and lack.

Modern polygamy as a malaise of the city is one of the major concerns of *Everything Good Will Come*. The heroine, Enitan Taiwo, adores her father and has every good reason to do so for not only does her father shower her with love and affection, he also protects her from her mother's harshness and "lack of relationship" with her. Enitan believes she has only one younger sibling, a boy who was born two years after her but who died of the sickle cell disease some years later thereby leaving her as a supposedly only child to both

parents. However, Enitan discovers later in life that she and her mother were living in the proverbial fool's paradise for, unknown to them, Enitan's father, Bamidele Sunny Taiwo, has an "outside family" in another city, Ibadan, and has been simultaneously raising his Ibadan family alongside the Lagos family. She finds out also that his other family has given him a son who is four years younger than her. Worse still, nearly everybody in the family including friends, colleagues and even employees of her father are aware of the existence of the secret son except Enitan and her mother who are successfully kept in the dark until the heroine stumbles on the information while working in her father's law chamber. Expectedly, the discovery devastates the heroine who is angered by what she perceives as her father's disloyalty and betrayal of her mother. Interestingly, her childhood friend and confidant, Sheri, dismisses Enitan's anger and frustration insisting that the double life which the heroine's father leads and his success at concealing it for so long are 'normal' with city life. According to her,

> These things are nothing […]. Half of Lagos had an outside family, and the other half wasn't aware […]. This is Lagos […]. You won't be the first, and you won't be the last. We just have to accept [...] (159,176).

In apparent demonstration of her understanding of the ways and goings on in the city, Enitan's mother agrees with Sheri's view. Hence, she shows neither shock nor surprise when her daughter breaks the news of her husband's disloyalty to her. Rather than worry over the issue of her husband's illegitimate child or his disloyalty, she laments his uncaring attitude towards her own dead son and reprimands her daughter for being rude to her father over the issue. '"You were rude to him… You will have to apologize. That is taboo, to call your father a liar" (177), Arin tells her daughter. Events in the novel also confirm that modern polygamy is a reality that cannot be wished away in the city. Sunny Taiwo suffers no negative consequence as a result of his double life as the heroine, his daughter, eventually settles her differences with him. She also meets and accepts the 'outside son' as her brother and the family kinship and bond remains unbroken throughout the world of the novel.

The negative role religion plays in the city is a major concern to Atta in *Everything Good Will Come*. The author seems to believe that the city bedevils its inhabitants with a lot of problems such that they often cling to religion as a means of escape and that women are more often the more vulnerable group. Atta seems to hold also that most propagators of religion in the city are mere charlatans who take advantage of the frustrations of city

dwellers to deceive them with a view to using them to acquire undeserved wealth. The heroine's mother, Arin, is presented in the novel as a religious fanatic but her religious fanaticism arises from her attempt to cope with several problems that confront her in the city. Some of the problems include marital frustration, idleness, loneliness, psychological and mental instability, lack of cordial relationship with her only daughter and perhaps, the worst of all, her only son's sickle cell disease and the failure of orthodox medicine to offer him a cure. She justifies her obsession with religion in a no holds barred conversation with her daughter:

> I took your brother to church […]. Hospital can't take sickle cell out of a child, hospital cannot make a dying child live. I am not an ignorant woman. There isn't a mother in the world who wouldn't believe that faith can heal her child after medicine has failed […] (178).

Although the problems that seem to abound in the city may not be different or worse than those existing in the village but the anonymity and coldness of the city tend to place extra burden on the city dwellers who hardly have opportunities to ventilate their concerns, worries and frustrations and who therefore resort to obsessive religious practices as a means of achieving succour. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of the city, the city appears to lack honest and true propagators of religion. Rather, religion in the city seems to be a thriving but deceptive business through which people are hoodwinked, cajoled and dispossessed of their money. Cyprian Ekwensi treats this concern in *Iska* where the reader is presented with a pathetic multitude of innocent but gullible worshippers who, unable to surmount the myriad of problems that confront them in the city, turn to religion for respite:

> One by one they waded into the water to be baptized. Watching their faces […] they were sincere. They believed that the enormous problems of life in the city could be solved by their devotion to prayer. […] childless women, who hoped to gain fertility, politicians in quest of power and position, school girls with examinations before them, men with families and no jobs. They were all there in the congregation (*Iska*: 142).

Atta and Ekwensi appear unanimous in their submissions that the type of religion being practised in the city often fails to meet the expectations of devoted adherents and that the reason is because its propagators are nothing but fraudsters camouflaging as good shepherds. In *Iska*, the man who claims to be a man of God acquires stupendous wealth while he pauperises his flock and this is far from being the only atrocity he commits. He turns the female members of his congregation into instruments of sexual pleasure and goes as far as making a married woman abandon her children, husband and home to become his

sex slave. Similarly in *Everything Good Will Come***,** the heroine's mother finds out too late that neither the church nor the pastor she has devoted her entire life to serving has a solution to her problems. Her son dies and she discovers that her pastor is only interested in the money she regularly pays as tithes.

One issue that seems to worry Emecheta and which she dwells on in *The Joys of Motherhood* is how city values conflict with village values. This conflict of values operates at several levels in the novel but two of them are particularly worth considering. The first deals with how the village criteria for assessing children who have benefitted from good parental upbringing sharply contrast with the city's measurement of same. In other words, the expectation and view of people in the countryside of responsible parenthood are completely at variance with what obtains in the city. By the city's standard for example, Nnu Ego and her husband should stand tall and hold their heads high for having trained two of their children to the point of acquiring university education in highly sought-after places like the United States of America and Canada. The people in the city consider parents whose children school abroad to be hard working and responsible and the parents in turn usually feel joyful and fulfilled at having highly educated children living abroad. It is in line with this city ethic that when his first son "gained a grade one in his Cambridge School Leaving Certificate…Nnaife celebrated his son's success…inviting…all his friends and army colleagues" (198).

In the village, however, successful and responsible parenthood consists in having one's sons live next door to one. Children, especially male children, must never live far away from their parents so that they can look after their parents at old age. Hence, Nnu Ego's in-laws banish her from her matrimonial home on her final return from the city to the village because her first two sons are studying and living far away in America and Canada. Nnaife, their father, is exonerated from blame because he is in prison but Nnu Ego has to take all the blame because she has been around all through and has failed to make her children stay with her which in the reckoning of people living in the countryside also means that she has failed as a mother:

> At home in Ibuza, Nnaife's people branded her a bad woman, and she had to go and live with her own people… She had expected this, knowing full well that only good children belonged to the father…(223).

The other level where the conflict between city and village values manifests is in the method of conflict resolution. Nnaife's aggressive behaviour, particularly the fact that he

threatens with a cutlass and wounds family members of his daughter's intended husband when he is informed of her decision to marry a man he has neither chosen for her nor approved of may have been considered normal and legitimate in the village setting. In fact, Nnaife may have been placated, begged, appeased and even worshipped by his would-be-in-laws so as to secure his consent but things are done differently in the city. No sooner has Nnaife started his protest when his Yoruba in-laws pointedly tell him that "Look, this is Lagos, not your town or your village" (210). They do not stop at merely warning him, they also ensure that he is arrested by law enforcement agents in the city. Hence, it is an astounded Nnaife who, shortly after attacking his would-be in-laws, beholds the arrival of a police van into which he is immediately bundled and thereafter arraigned and sentenced to a five-year jail term.

Atta also examines the conflict between the village and city values in her work but obviously due to the generational gap between Emecheta and Atta, the younger novelist's perception and treatment of the problem is different in many significant respects. One of the issues portrayed in *Swallow*, for example, is how the city environment unduly commercialises the bride price system which is an integral part of village tradition. While agreeing that the bride price system is instituted in the village setting to serve as a means of appreciating the family of the bride for having taken proper care of their daughter, Atta observes that the system appears to be constituting a huge challenge to young men and women aspiring to get married in the city because city life tends to manipulate, bastardise and destroy the concept:

> In Lagos, every relationship began and ended with a question of money. […] What used to be a tradition was now a means of extortion. The women of the bride's family drew up a list and presented it at her engagement ceremony. Sometimes, families stated exactly how much naira they wanted (14).

Atta seems to be arguing that the essence of the bride price system is being completely destroyed and ridiculed in the city and that brazen irresponsibility and recklessness that appear to characterise city life are gradually encroaching on one of Nigeria's finest customs. Consequently, a majority of young women dwelling in the city are being rendered unmarriageable since eligible bachelors may not be able to raise the bride price being demanded in the city. This scenario assumes a ridiculous dimension in *Swallow* when the heroine, in her late twenties and desperate for marriage, goes as far as pleading with her boyfriend to accept her entire life savings to enable him to pay her bride price:

> I had told Sanwo […] I had a savings account at the bank […]. I could withdraw the money and […] we could use […] towards my dowry. He said that was like telling him he was not a real man […] (14).

Unfortunately, the woman in the city increasingly becomes desperate and frustrated as time and age continue to take a toll on her. Hence, the bride price system, innocently conceived and instituted to serve as part of Nigeria's proud cultural heritage is being turned into a clog in the wheel of progress of the modern Nigerian woman residing in the city. Little wonder then promiscuity and waywardness are the norm in the city as the eligible bachelors shy away from marriage. The heroine's lament is indicative of the seriousness of the issue and of Atta's worry over it:

> He was the same man who had …ironed my work clothes if I asked, and nursed me through bouts of malaria, but the moment he heard the word "marriage," he was on defence; I was the enemy. How could the word alone bring on such a reaction in him, and what would I do then? Remain his girlfriend forever? (29).

Another problem that seems to brew as a result of the conflict between the village and city values and which appears to be of concern to Atta is the implication of the absence of strong family ties which is a feature of city life**.** In *Swallow***,** the ease with which Rose, the heroine's flatmate, succumbs to the temptation to courier drugs is impliedly as a result of her not having a real sense of kinship with anyone. Rose is raised by her mother alongside five or six other siblings with most of them having different fathers. A thoroughly wayward woman nicknamed Sisi, which is a derogatory reference to her tendency to want to go on living like a spinster for life, Rose's mother leads a life of irresponsibility which she also shamelessly passes on to her children:

> Sisi …treated all her children like little armed robbers and miniature call girls. Sisi sent her sons to beg their father's relations for money as soon as they were able to walk. She taught her daughters how to attract men even before their bodies developed (52).

Worst of all, she commits the worst degree of incest with her first son and has yet another child by him whom she nicknames "Somebody." Consequently, lack of love or respect, mutual suspicion and outright hatred characterise the relationship existing among all Rose's siblings culminating in her believing that she has no one she can truly call her own. With her family history and the fact that she has not benefited from parental admonition or guidance as a growing child or even as an adult, the reader understands why the heroine's counsel to Rose that she should rise above the temptation to smuggle drugs and instead

wait patiently until she picks an honest job falls on deaf ears. She further elicits the reader's sympathy when she tells Tolani that the reason why Tolani can persevere is because she has people to depend on for feeding and general sustenance reiterating that in her own case, she has no one to support her, hence, her desperation to survive (208).

Atta seems to be saying that strong family ties and a sense of kinship which are present in the village but appear to be lacking in the city, are of great essence especially to the modern woman living in a large, cold and anonymous city like Lagos, if she is to cope with the vagaries of city life. The need for women to have strong family ties to be able to survive and live decently in the city becomes even more compelling when it is viewed that it seems women (perhaps more than men), tend to derive their emotional and psychological balance from strong family attachment. It is arguable therefore, that if Rose has had a sense of family in the city, it may have given her a strong enough reason not to get involved in any of the dirty deals in the city. After all, Tolani overcomes the temptation only on account of the love and affection she believes her mother, who instructively is not a city dweller, has for her and which she in turn, chooses to uphold, honour and cherish. Atta's submission therefore, seems to be that relationships in the city are superficial rather than being deep and truly affectionate. In his article "Urbanism as a Way of Life," Louis Wirth (1938:2) also discusses the seeming superficiality of relations in the city when he asserts that the "city is characterized by secondary rather than primary contacts." He observes that while the contacts of the city may be face to face; they are rather impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmented (2). In what seems to be a confirmation of Wirth's assertions, Atta's heroine in *Swallow* confesses that there is no depth in her relationship with other residents in Lagos as each individual appears to be weighed down by the many burdens in the city. According to her:

> Most days, I barely saw the people I greeted along the way. "How now? Good evening. Long time." I was in a trance (22).

Tolani observes also that some "Lagosians came to neighbouring towns …to avoid the crowds" (38). Hence, Atta presents three distinct settings; the first, she describes as the "farming settlement," the second, as the "town centre" and the third, "the city – Lagos." Atta's "town centre" may be likened to what is now generally being regarded as suburbia or semi-city in common parlance. Could this be taken as a veiled recommendation for the creation of semi-cities as alternatives to cities? In other words, is Atta implying a preference for suburbia as a means of escaping the choking air of the city?

It may not be unreasonable to argue that Atta seems to be advocating a movement from the city to the suburbia in view of the fact that at the end of the novel, the heroine, Tolani, leaves the city for the "town centre" although initially with a plan to spend only her vacation there and return to the city; but upon receiving news of the termination of her appointment a day before she is due to leave the "town centre," she promptly decides to go on living in the "town centre" where she says she and her mother will "make clothes and sell" (53). If indeed Atta is advocating a movement from the city to the suburbia, then, she will be re-echoing the wish of some other writers and observers of city life among who is Jesse Kartuem (2007), who describes the suburbia as a hybrid of the rural and the urban landscape. He submits that there is something special about acquaintances in suburbia and that people are more likely to be involved in some sort of social group in the suburbia unlike in the city where he argues that physical contacts are close but social contacts are distant. Furthermore, Atta appears to hold the view that women are at the receiving end of some societal problems that are more prevalent in the city and that it ought not to be so.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Atta seems to suggest that there is a preponderance of rape in the city and that it usually leaves its victims, who are mostly women, with far-reaching consequences including permanent destruction of their lives. Two women, Sheri and the one referred to as "mother of prisons," are victims of rape and they both have their lives negatively and permanently altered as a result of their experience. Sheri is raped by a group of young schoolboys when she is a teenager and she gets pregnant through it. Because she is young, innocent and ignorant at the time the incident occurs, she attempts to abort the pregnancy by herself using a dangerous weapon – a hanger. The consequence for Sheri is a permanently impaired womb which seals her hope of procreation for life. It is also impliedly because of this incident that she is unmarried for her entire lifetime. She chronicles her misery this way:

> I did not rape them; they raped me […]. And […]what did I know? Taking a hanger to myself […]. So, which single man from a normal family would have a person like me? Better to be ugly, to be crippled to be a thief even, than to be barren (106).

That is the pathetic story of a young rape victim in the city. Also in the city and despite the fact that "mother of prisons" is an adult, experienced, a mother of twins and a widow who says her life experience has taught her to be strong and to defend herself, her strength of character fails to protect her from the harsh consequences that come upon her following her courage to resist rape. "Mother of prisons" has earlier been subjected to negative

traditional practices such as the shaving of her hair, her confinement to a room in a state of nakedness and also being forced to drink the bath water of her husband's corpse. Indeed, "Mother of prisons" appears to have gone through a lot prior to the rape attempt made on her in the city. It is perhaps this string of demeaning experiences that propels her to rise up to the occasion of defending herself and the dignity of her womanhood by grabbing a stone and whacking the head of the man who attempts to sexually assault her, an action that results in the death of the man consequent upon which "Mother of prisons" is put into jail.

Atta's view on the subject of rape in the city seems to be that it causes permanent damage to the woman irrespective of whether or not the rapist is punished. She appears to submit also that the widely held belief that a woman can be blamed for being raped as a result of indecent dressing prevalent in the city and the perceived lack of decorum associated with city women is untenable as justification for rape. She seems to argue that while the Nigerian society has earlier succeeded in making her find reasons and justification to blame the woman who is usually the victim in a rape situation, her exposure to other cities of the western world convinces her that the woman should not be made to take the blame.

Another problem Atta seems to identify as compounding the crisis of urbanisation is the prevalence of spousal separation and divorce in the city as only few marriages appear to survive in the city. The world of *Everything Good Will Come* is replete with rampant separations, divorce and wilful resort to single parenthood. Enitan's boyfriend during their National Youth Service Corps Programme, Mike, unwittingly provides her with a direction on how she will later live her life in the city when he tells her that "thousands of single women are living on their own, all over town" (120). This is shortly after Enitan returns to Lagos on completion of her education in England. Now settled as a permanent Lagos resident, she provides the lens through which the reader beholds the city and its inhabitants. Alas, a majority of adults living in Lagos are separated, divorced, unmarried or at best squabbling couples. We may begin the exploration of the malaise with the heroine's parents whose marriage, while it lasts, is characterised by unhappiness, accusations and counter accusations until the marriage breaks down irretrievably while their daughter is still studying in England. Enitan later finds her parents' divorce papers and the reader gets to know the grounds of the divorce to be as follows:

> My mother had given her reasons for falling out with my father: a neglected and uncaring attitude; withheld housekeeping allowance; on several occasions did not return home and gave no reasonable answer as to his whereabouts; influenced her child to disregard her;

> disrespected her church family; made wicked and false allegations about her sanity; colluded with family members to alienate her; caused her much embarrassment and unhappiness (288, 289).

Then, there is Mrs. Williams, a woman "high, high up" in a company but whose husband drives her out "because she was always going out; parties…" (p. 293). Sheri is also unmarried and there is no indication throughout the novel that she ever will be married. Perhaps, the only character whose marriage still subsists at the end of the novel is Grace Ameh who confesses to Enitan that she cannot honestly lay claim to having the full support of her family in the way she lives her life and about the activities she is involved in but that she simply "wouldn't have it any other way" (262). Instructively, Ameh's husband is a man with a "scowl" although the heroine is unable to decipher who the man is angry with (286). It does not come to the reader as a surprise therefore, when at the end of the novel, the heroine moves out of her matrimonial home and opts for a life of single parenthood without provocation or any irreconcilable marital difference. It is instructive also that Enitan's husband has been a divorcee prior to his marriage to the heroine having been involved in a previous marriage that has produced a son before it crashed. Indeed, Atta's submission on the place of marriage in the city where the woman commands a good measure of economic independence is not very clear. What is the significance of the heroine's celebration of her voluntary and seemingly needless separation from her husband?

Also of concern to Atta is the tendency for children that are being raised in the city to have little or no regard for societal norms. Sheri is a thorough-bred city child without regard for cultural norms and whose philosophy seems to be: live as the city lets you. She explains the circumstance that defines her personality:

> I was raised in downtown Lagos [...]. Bring the Queen of England there. She will learn how to fight [...]. After what my eyes have seen? If I'm not crazy, what else will I be? (174-175).

Similarly, Damola and his fellow city lads perfect the art of partying, smoking of hemp and raping girls while still in their teens. Little wonder then that the heroine's parents forbid her from mixing and interacting with neighbours' children as a growing child. Unlike in the village where children are encouraged to play with other children under the moonlight, privileged parents in the city do everything they can to prevent their children from intermingling with other children so as to forestall negative peer group influence, which appears to be a peculiar feature of the city.

A corollary to the above concern is that coldness, loneliness and boredom seem to dominate city life notwithstanding its glitz, glamour and crowd. "My mother didn't want me playing with the Bakare children" and "I was bored" (17) are some of the major complaints of Enitan as an adolescent. Her childhood friend, Sheri, also observes that Enitan is "always indoors" and that their house is "like a graveyard" (58). The life of the heroine's mother is a study in loneliness and misery. Her active involvement in church activities does not seem to prevent her from being lonely. Housemaids after housemaids desert her either because she is deemed to be unkind by them or because the city girls who serve as housemaids are too restless and ambitious to stay long with one master. Consequently, she is alone most of the time and although she has tenants, some of whom she appears to have robust relationship with like Mrs. Williams, they are apparently equally wrapped up in their own lonely world to be of considerable help to her. Hence, it takes an entire day before her death is discovered by her visiting daughter as none of her tenants/neighbours notice that she has not been seen. The city appears to be a very cold and lonely place to live in. Even Sheri, the quintessential city girl, is not spared of the city's coldness and loneliness.

Another thematic pre-occupation of *Everything Good Will Come* is the apparent class stratification existing in the city, a theme that seems to worry most writers of urban life as they continue to draw attention to it in their writings. "Mother of Prisons" challenges the heroine and accuses her of insensitivity following a chance encounter with her in a police cell. Referring to her as "*aje butter*," (277) a veiled reference to her privileged position in society, "Mother of Prisons" laments the plight of the urban poor and how the affluent appear unconcerned about their situation as well as the condescending attitude of these people to the less privileged: "You don't consider us your equals, you *aje butter*. You see us and you think we're no better than animals" (277). Festus Iyayi also laments that there is a growing disconnect between the urban rich and the urban poor in *Violence* where the comfort of the chair in the sitting room of Obofon (a rich but wicked and insensitive philandering city dweller), is so exquisite that Adisa's "back began to ache" (121) when she sat on it. She has gone there to solicit financial assistance to settle her sick husband's medical bills; but Obofun insists that he will give her money only if she is willing to give him sex in return.

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro, the spirit child and narrator of events in the novel, is prone to getting lost perhaps due to the largeness of the city. On one of such occasions, a police

officer volunteers to look after him until his parents are able to locate him. In the police officer's house, Azaro discovers that there are two separate worlds in the same city and he gives vivid descriptions of these unrelated, yet physically close environments. In the police officer's house:

> The living room […] was very spacious and comfortable. The carpets were thick, and there were framed diplomas on the blue walls [...]. There were pictures of the police officer, his wife, and a handsome boy who had sad eyes (19).

In Azaro's parents' home:

> The room was very small. It was full of the mood of his sleep, of hunger, and despair, sleepless nights and the gloom of candle smoke. On the centre table […] there was a half-empty bottle of ogogoro, an ashtray, and a packet of cigarettes. There was a mosquito coil on the table as well and its acrid smoke filled the room (28).

Similarly in *Invisible Chapters*, Maik Nwosu vividly captures how a once shanty town of Maroko with festering gutters that are notorious for stench is transformed into an "almost immaculate New Queenstown" (38). Of significance is the fact that once the transformation has been completed, the class of people who inhabit the place also changes. Whereas the Old Maroko is inhabited by the urban poor, only the affluent populate New Queenstown. Thus, in *Everything Good Will Come*, the heroine lives in a neighbourhood where "several had wide satellite dishes perched on their roofs…" (204), but her friend, Sheri, says she knows people who live in the same city and who can be hired to beat up people "for ten naira alone" (174). Other thematic concerns of the novel include high cost of living in the city; high inflationary trends and vices in the city such as armed robbery, prostitution, filth and proliferation of fake and expired drugs among many others.

Atta's most dominant concern in *Swallow* from which the novel also derives its title is a major vice in the city – drug trafficking. The author observes that while most drug traffickers in the city are women (188) – suggesting that women in the city are more susceptible to trafficking in drugs – women are usually not the barons; they are mere couriers or mules who run errands for men. Through the novel, Atta examines critically why women traffic in drugs in the city particularly against the backdrop of the usual excuses often offered by women drug traffickers. These excuses, as suggested in the novel, include claims of bad fortune, poverty and ignorance. While some women are

quick to tell sad stories of actual or threat of misfortune with no one to turn to or depend on for assistance, many of them claim to be ignorant or innocent when they are caught. "A boyfriend or some other benefactor bought them a ticket and handed them a suitcase already stashed with drugs" (188), some say, while others in the world of the novel claim they are poor. However, Atta seems to regard such claims and excuses as bogus. She seems to be saying that most women drug traffickers are enlightened and educated enough to understand the business they are involved in and the implication of their action, and that such women may be victims of the glamour, the glow and the glitz of city life whose overriding philosophy seems to be get rich quick:

> If anyone claimed that they smuggled drugs because they were poor, they were lying. Poor people begged. […]They walked around barefoot and put out their hands to pray, mostly to Allah, for alms. Kobo coins. Pittance. I was sure that they would refuse to smuggle drugs.... most smugglers were women like Rose and me. We had seen enough to know about fine living; to know that it was possible for a woman to walk into a place and people might almost help her to wipe her ass just because she had money. (*Swallow*, 187-188).

Through her heroine, Tolani, Atta also identifies other reasons why drug trafficking is a lucrative business in the city. One of such reasons is that "there were drug smugglers who were making millions of naira" (187) and who have consequently found trafficking in drugs to be a lucrative career. Another reason is because "most smugglers were not caught" (188) thereby encouraging more and more people to get involved in the illicit trade. But perhaps, at the core of city women's susceptibility to trafficking in drugs lies not only the tendency of the female to desire the 'good' things of life, usually frivolous things like shoes and jewelleries which abound in the city, but also their often misguided philosophy of wanting to use men to acquire material things and money without having to work hard for them. Rose Adamson, who agrees to courier drugs to England but who wastes her life in the process, provides an insight into the inner recesses of a typical female living in the city with eyes on the glitz and glamour of the city. She tells her friend excitedly:

> He will give us drugs to swallow and arrange for us to travel overseas. We get there and come back. That's all we need to do and we get paid [...]. One journey," she said. That's all. A thousand five hundred dollars (125-126).

It is significant that OC Okwonkwo, the man who introduces Rose to drug trafficking, is able to get her attention and interest merely by buying her a pair of shoes which her

boyfriend is either unable or unwilling to buy for her. In other words, a pair of shoes is enough for OC to lure Rose into an untimely death.

Also of concern to Atta in *Swallow* is the seeming victimisation of women by men at work places in the city occasioned by the necessity for women in the city to earn a living outside their family and immediate environment. Unfortunately, this prevailing circumstance of women in the city exposes them to men who, more often than not, attempt to use them to satisfy their sexual urge and victimise them if they refuse to be so used. Sexual harassment at work places and its negative consequences on the modern working class women in the city plays a significant role in directing events in the novel and in determining the fate of the heroine and her colleague and flatmate. Rose's woes begin very early in the novel when she is sacked by her manager, Mr. Salako.

Prior to her sack, Rose has impliedly been tending to Salako's extra-marital sexual needs while also working directly under him as his secretary. But for reasons that are not made clear in the novel, Rose appears to get tired of being a mere tool for her boss' sexual pleasure after some time and becomes rude and insolent to him, hence he promptly sacks her for alleged insubordination. Using official might at his disposal, Salako also orders the heroine's transfer to replace her sacked colleague as his secretary with the intention of using her as yet another tool for the satisfaction of his sexual pleasure. However, unlike Rose who tolerates Salako for a long time without divulging the secret even to her flatmate, Tolani refuses to accept the indignity of having to sleep with a man simply on account of being his subordinate in the work place. Salako does not take her rebuff lightly issuing her with a suspension letter with a promise to ensure that she eventually loses her job: "I will make sure you leave this job" (169). Expectedly, the relationship between the two becomes frosty and neither Tolani nor indeed the reader is surprised when Tolani receives the news of the termination of her appointment from the bank.

Thus, a man succeeds in destroying the promising careers of two women in the city; and in the case of Rose, her entire life is destroyed because the incident is the remote cause of her death. Unfortunately, Atta does not seem to think that this ugly trend in the city may be reversed soon enough. Events in the novel seem to suggest that the women who live in the city may have to continue to tolerate or devise means of coping with sexual harassment in their work places. Perhaps, they may have to regard the menace as part of the conditions for living in the city. A pointer to this submission is that no one calls Salako to order

throughout the novel which may be taken as an indication that he may continue in the practice.

A very significant thematic preoccupation of *Swallow* is the assertion that the quest for money is the motive behind every city dweller's sojourn in the city. Interestingly, the same theme runs through nearly all the books being examined in this study. From Cyprian Ekwensi, through Chinua Achebe, to Buchi Emecheta, Maik Nwosu and Sefi Atta, the theme of money or the search for it as a basis for sojourning in the city predominates. A look at a few passages from some of the selected novels is necessary to confirm this assertion:

> It's money I want now,' she said […]. 'I'm coming to visit you, Amusa, so get some money ready.'
> I want new clothes: the native Accra dress […] really special […]. I want to be wearing glamour specs. Not for my eyes – my eyes are okay – but for fancy. And a gold watch […]. Now I must enjoy all I dreamed of at night in my cell (*People of the City*, 69 - 70).

> […] Living in Lagos City, they […] all came to make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money (*Jagua Nana*, 5-6).

> Then by way of light relief someone took up the President on his statement that it was work that brought them four hundred miles to Lagos. 'It is money, not work' […]. 'We left plenty of work at home [...]. Anyone who likes work can return home, take up his matchet and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino. It will keep him occupied to his last days. The meeting agreed that it was money, not work, that brought them to Lagos (*No Longer at Ease*, 72).

Atta goes further than identifying the quest for money as being the primary motive of people residing in the city. She attempts an appraisal of the consequences of this quest first on the city dwellers and then on city life and especially the elements that define and ultimately tarnish the image of the city and the integrity of city dwellers. Using one of her characters as her mouthpiece, Atta submits that:

> We come to Lagos in search of money […]. We get caught up in the quest. We take and take and give nothing back. The land becomes a fertile ground for corruption (134).

Atta seems to be suggesting that sojourning in the city in quest for money may not necessarily be tantamount to a vice; but failing to have a sense of responsibility and proportion that ought to guide such a quest and especially not recognising and maintaining boundaries as well as acceptable standards of behaviour perennially earn the city a negative image.

A corollary to the above concern is the seeming insincerity that tends to characterise officialdom in the city. The world of the Federal Community Bank in the novel is a world of inefficiency, fraud, corruption, ineptitude, graft, falsehood, highhandedness, gross indiscipline and flagrant immorality. In a way, the Federal Community Bank is a microcosm of all government institutions, agencies and departments in the city. The people at the helm of affairs issue official directives knowing such directives to be ineffectual for they are insincere. Little wonder that the endless bad debt notices Tolani types daily while working as secretary to the bank manager yields no replies. The reader does not expect to see any reply either since the managers connive, most times with others or themselves as imaginary customers to grant loans that find their way back into the personal accounts of the managers. Hence, gossiping, bickering and indolence pervade the atmosphere in the bank.

Also preoccupying the novel is the accusation that the city often co-opts its residents into unhelpful activities and engenders attitudes and behaviours that are not in tune with their natural dispositions. "…People get drawn into all sorts in this city" (133), Tolani says as if in sympathy with Johnny's persistent refusal to disclose his means of livelihood in the city. When asked about what he does for a living, Johnny's answer is always "business" and if prodded further on what type of business he engages in, his constant and only response is "things." No one knows how Johnny survives or earns his living in the city throughout the novel. Similarly, as Tolani and Rose start practising how to swallow drugs to prepare them for their role as drug traffickers, Tolani expresses confidence in their ability to follow through, because Lagos has made them tough (192). Even Tolani's unusual bravery by contriving a juju scare aimed at setting herself free from undue persecution by her boss is attributed to city wisdom.

One significant feature of all city exploits, however, is that they often have results that are not intended or anticipated by the city dwellers; in other words, they backfire. Rose, who proves to be the only one tough enough to carry through her plan of becoming a drug

trafficker, loses her life in the process. Johnny Walker, who is always smartly dressed with powerful cologne but without a visible means of livelihood is struck by a mysterious illness that impliedly claims his life and Tolani's bravery is unable to save her job as Salako still sacks her. Atta is not the only author who seems to think that the city is responsible for the unhelpful decisions that its inhabitants make. A similar theme runs through nearly all Cyprian Ekwensi's city novels where he regularly blames the city for the misfortune of his characters. In *Iska*, for example, the heroine, Filia Enu, asserts that in Lagos:

> […] it seemed essential that men and women must continue to plunge headlong into disaster – at every turn of the road (125).

This view also tends to agree with the one expressed by Lewis Mumford (1961) that "the city facilitates the unfortunate or unhelpful decisions of its inhabitants" (*Cities*, 2004, 304). Even Kaine Agary's heroine in *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), Zilayefa, who can be described as a privileged city dweller because she arrives in the city into the caring hands of a wealthy woman, is not saved from near destruction. Zilayefa, also known as Yellow-Yellow, easily finds solace in the arms of an older lover in the city having been tormented by identity problem and the agony of not knowing her biologigal father throughout her stay in the ciountryside. In no time however, she finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy and feels compelled to commit a dangerous abortion at the end of the novel which only time can determine its effect on her life and health.

Also of concern to Atta in *Swallow* are problems commonly associated with the city including high cost of living, insecurity of lives, high accident rate, poor infrastructural facilities such as energy and poor transportation system as well as poor medical facilities.

In examining individual characters in the three selected novels in this chapter with a view to discovering the characters that survive better in the city and why, one finds that Emecheta's heroine in *The Joys Motherhood,* Nnu Ego, is not a regular city dweller and that there can be little or no expectation of her character being able to dramatically change the behaviour of the city or influence it in any significant way. Unlike the familiar city dwellers who usually come to the city for a job or other opportunities that they believe exist in the city but are lacking in the countryside, Nnu Ego is not in the city to pursue wealth or a thriving career; she is in the city for an unusual reason – she is searching for fulfilment in motherhood and the joy she envisions it will bring to her. She elicits both the

sympathy and affection of the reader not just because she is not educated but also because her life has been dogged by marital unhappiness and she now finds herself in the big city of Lagos where she has to grapple with the demands of an environment she does not understand while also trying to accomplish her primary objective of sojourning in the city – marital fulfilment through procreation. The uniqueness of Nnu Ego's character as a protagonist consists in her near total disinterest in the frills of the city. To her credit and unlike most protagonists in city novels, she remains focused and steadfast throughout the novel. Her mission in the city, an uncommon mission, is to achieve motherhood, and having achieved her goal, her focus is to care for her children, nurture them, and generally give her best to the task of mothering with a view to settling down at her old age to enjoying the widely touted fruits of her labour.

Therefore, unlike most characters who misuse the freedom of the city, misplace or confuse their priorities or easily get carried away by the glitz of the city, Nnu Ego can be said to have been positively influenced by the city in many ways. First, she finds a new religion – Christianity in the city. When she first comes into contact with it through her husband's membership of their town's union of which she also becomes a member on account of her marriage, she is initially sceptical about the new religion. Hence, she exhibits a lukewarm attitude towards it. However, she later warms up to the religion and it proves to be of immense benefit to her in handling the family's economic and other problems: "Her new Christian religion taught her to bear her cross with fortitude. Hers was to support her family; she would do so, until her husband found a new job" (89). Also, if Nnu Ego knew about the existence of western education prior to her coming to the city, she did not understand it. It is doubtful also that she would have been willing to put herself through so much stress and strain to see her children through school. Before her coming to live in Lagos, her dream of happy and successful parenting was to have sons whose standard of living would not be different from hers and her husband's. She had looked forward to raising children who would grow up to take up residence near her as either farmers or hunters or both. But the city changes her world-view and perception of success. When she realises that the values of the city are radically different from those of the countryside, she quickly adjusts her ways, adapts to the new attitude of the city and reconditions her mind towards her role as a mother in an urban landscape. The flexibility of her character is revealed in one of her conversations with her second son, Adim:

> For you, the younger generation, it's a different kind of learning. It also takes longer and costs more. I'm […] beginning to like it […]. So […] put on your clean school uniform and hold your chin up, I shall see to it that your fees are paid […](213-214.).

Her strong capacity to adapt to new demands and strange situations and to confront unexpected challenges in the city is further illustrated by her survivalist activities through trading and the maintenance of a high moral standard throughout the novel. Notwithstanding her frequent lamentation that she does not enjoy a normal marriage (181), she never contemplates betraying her husband through sexual immorality even with the man's insatiable appetite for sex as revealed by his sexual liaisons with other women. Her relationship with Mama Abby, a single parent, is also to the family's advantage as she learns from her how to save money and plan for the future in addition to the woman's frequent positive interventions and assistance, especially to her children.

Unfortunately however, the flaws in her character become more manifest after her relocation to the city. Events in the novel seem to suggest that the city encourages and promotes ostentatious living as exhibited by Adaku and her cousin, Igbonoba's wife. Nnu Ego is unable to understand why Adaku and her cousin enjoy ostentatious and comfortable living while she wallows in poverty and lack. Hence, in a fit of frustrated anger, she unleashes unwarranted and misplaced aggression on Igbonoba's wife thereby demonstrating her immaturity and some measure of lack of emotional and psychological control. There appears to be a condition in the city that easily predisposes Nnu Ego to frustration as she exhibits jealousy, pettiness and unnecessary suspicion towards her fellow women in the city. She envies the easy carriage and financial fortunes of her husband's younger wife, Adaku and gradually becomes jealous of her. Also, what starts as petty jealousy nearly snowballs into a full scale crisis after Nnu Ego "did everything she could to make Adaku jealous of her sons" (162) and the latter takes no notice. She then contrives another method of punishing her by inviting their kinsmen in the city to come and settle a matter that she could have overlooked. Her suspicion of the likelihood of Adaku harming her children spiritually and the extreme to which she goes in seeking the services of a charlatan to protect her son is also a demonstration of her emotional and psychological insecurity which her frustration and growing difficulty to survive and make ends meet in the city appear to have brought upon her.

An indication that Nnu Ego is not inherently bad and that pressures from the city may have been responsible for the unpredictability in her character manifests in the way she

demonstrates that she is a woman of conscience. She goes to great length to make up for her 'anti-social behaviour' towards Adaku's cousin. She is also humble enough to personally and directly apologise to Adaku for the humiliation the younger woman suffers from the men Nnu Ego brings in to their house to settle their quarrel. Although Nnu Ego is an unfortunate woman whose expected joy of motherhood seems to have been truncated by the vagaries of the city, all those who interact with her closely like her husband, children and her city neighbours, including even her landlord acknowledge and respect her good character, her soundness of mind, and above all, her passion and commitment to motherhood. Despite her not being educated, Nnu Ego possesses many admirable qualities. She is hardworking, focused, determined, caring, loving and supportive of her family. She is also imaginative and creative with a commendable planning and organisational skill all of which she brings to bear on her struggle for survival in the city but which unfortunately prove to be inadequate because the ways of the city appear strange and incomprehensible.

Adaku's role in *The Joys of Motherhood* is that of a trail blazer for women living in the city. Her sojourn in the city seems to be to demonstrate to women, perhaps, to men too, the capabilities of the modern woman who has the privilege of dwelling in the city. Her character is a perfect illustration of how women can take advantage of city life to free themselves from the shackles of tradition that tends to undermine their individuality and condemn them to perpetual subjugation to the men folk. Adaku is a cheerful woman by nature. She is also confident, charming, polite, unassuming, moderately ambitious and roundly harmless. Although not particularly a lucky woman by village standard – not being able to produce a male child for her husband before his demise – the young Adaku is willing to continue to be a participant in a polygamous arrangement in the city as an inherited wife to her late husband's younger brother, Nnaife. After all, she has co-existed with two other women as co-wives in the village when her first husband was alive. Not only is she willing to accept polygamy as a way of life, even in the city, she is also determined to give her best to it. In other words, she has not set out from the village to the city with any grand design for self liberation. She does not even seem to be aware of the liberties in the city. She arrives in the city with an intention to go on being a dutiful wife as her people's tradition requires of her.

In the city however, there is an entirely different ethic which runs contrary to the village ethic but there are also village people residing in the city including Nnu Ego, who, at every opportunity, callously remind her of her failure according to tradition. Therefore, Adaku

faces a dilemma as she is torn between acceding to the city's way of life which beckons on her and promises not to place the burden of a feeling of failure on her or to go on struggling to achieve happiness in accordance with the dictate of village tradition. She initially chooses to live in conformity with village custom but the birth of yet another daughter, her third, confirms her status as a failed woman according to village custom. Thus, neither Nnaife nor even Adaku, derives real joy and fulfilment from the development. Nnaife is decidedly nonchalant as he begins to treat Adaku as a mere tool for sexual pleasure. Adaku, on the other hand, puts up her best to please her husband. She wants her new marriage to work and she readily submits herself to the authority of her senior co-wife respectfully addressing her as "my senior" and offering to assist her children as much as possible. All attempts Adaku makes to be accepted and respected however fail to yield the desired result as she appears to be dealing with people with a fixed mindset regarding the criteria for a successful marriage: any marriage without a male child cannot be deemed to be successful.

Finally, unable to gain the respect of her people and now living in a city with seeming boundless opportunities for freedom, Adaku decides to embrace the freedom being offered to her by the city. She liberates herself from gloom and despondency by opting for single parenthood which tradition seriously frowns upon but which the city condones. It is possible to argue, therefore, that it is the city that succeeds in changing Adaku's character, attitude and behaviour upon having contact with it rather than the city being influenced by Adaku's character traits. To her credit however, Adaku does not break loose into a life of promiscuity and irresponsibility in the city although she once threatens to do so in a moment of anger and frustration. She however comports herself, choosing instead to live a responsible but free life as a single parent dedicated to taking care of her children. She concentrates her energy on doing honest business in the city which provides her with sufficient money to put her daughters in good schools. "I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters…" (170-171), she tells Nnu Ego proudly. Adaku appears to be a pacesetter for women of her generation after which many more women will throng the city in search of mental, psychological and economic freedom.

Cordelia is the wife of Ubani, Nnaife's closest friend in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Cordelia is dull, slavish, impassive, docile and completely without initiative. Her life and activities in the novel constitute a direct negation of the widely held view that to survive in the city, a city dweller needs to possess a survivalist spirit, be strong, agile, and calculating. Rather,

her life seems to bear testimony to the fact that the city not only accommodates, but that it also conveniently tolerates and condones the weak and lazy ones especially insofar as they have people to lean on. Cordelia's significance in the novel consists in her docility and impassivity. She remains inactive and unproductive (apart from making babies) throughout the novel. She does not also appear to have views of her own, has no recognisable personality and depends absolutely on her husband for her feeding and the general upkeep of her children. Cordelia chooses to do nothing even when her husband loses his job in the city. She refuses to borrow the proverbial leaf of experience from Nnu Ego's efforts at facing the challenges that confront her family as a result of a similar fate that befalls Nnaife. While Nnu Ego who comes to live in the city long after Cordelia rises to financial challenges threatening the survival of her family by engaging in petty trading to forestall starvation and hunger, Cordelia sits back and does nothing and of course, knowing that he has a docile wife, Ubani struggles successfully to get another job. Cordelia'a attempt at defending her inadequacy through a conversation with Nnu Ego is instructive:

> But we can't go on living this way. Ubani has got a job with the railways. He'll be working as a cook there [...]. I think Ubani made his decision quickly as he knows I am not gifted in trading like you. Nnaife knows he can always rely on you (87-88).

Cordelia does not take advantage of having come to the city to make a difference in her life and it does not seem as if the city impacts much on her personality, carriage or world view. She has neither an ambition nor a specific plan on how to improve her life and at no point in the novel does she engage in a serious consideration or take a decisive step on how to secure the future of her children. She appears to be content with being a domestic servant's wife and surviving on the meagre income her husband earns. Probably to hide her inadequacies or because she lacks the confidence to do so, Cordelia does not make new friends in the city preferring to limit her interactions with people from her village only.

However, it must be pointed out, to Cordelia's credit, that it seems her refusal to embrace new ideas and idiosyncrasies of the city works to achieve harmony and peaceful co-existence between her and her husband. She is submissive and dutiful to her husband and although she lacks the initiative on how to generate income for the family, it appears she is a good manager of the meagre resources her husband provides. Above all, she is not argumentative and while Nnu Ego's home boils in incessant family squabbles, Cordelia's

home remains peaceful throughout the novel. Her name suggests cordiality. Could we say that she is true to her name? Perhaps, her relative lack of ambition in the city is a virtue in many respects for while Nnu Ego agonises and suffers because of her inability to keep pace with the fast tempo of the city and the heroine makes herself miserable and sometimes conducts herself in an anti-social manner because she cannot afford the glitter of the city such as fine clothes and expensive jewelleries, Cordelia seems not to have taken notice of the existence of such frivolities and if she does, she acts as if she does not care about them. She is a woman whose inward and outward peace and calm can neither be affected nor destroyed by the vagaries of the city. Indeed, Cordelia's happiness seems to be beyond the city's understanding especially because peace and happiness often elude most residents of the city.

Cordelia's character appears to be making a statement about the type of character that survives better in the city. Her character appears to be suggesting that inhabitants of the city may not necessarily need to embrace or adopt the city's ways and attitude in order to survive in the city; that those who come into the city and hold tenaciously to their provincial or village values may cope in the city as well although it seems also that only those who have and are willing to depend on others for their needs can conveniently choose to stand aloof in the city and still survive relatively well.

Kehinde's character in *The Joys of Motherhood* is not well developed but her character is significant by her marriage to a man from a different tribe especially given the setting of the novel which is pre-independence Nigeria when inter-ethnic marriage is considered to be an aberration. Described by the author as "the quieter and deeper of the twins" (174) and by the heroine of the novel, her mother, as "very quiet and observant" (174), Kehinde appears to be the first person in her family to have recognised the compelling changes city life is bound to bring on its dwellers, although her parents in naming her and her twin sister, Kehinde and Taiwo respectively, have unwittingly acknowledged and indeed accepted the inevitability of the mixing together of people from diverse backgrounds which the city engenders and the fact that city dwellers will voluntarily or otherwise imbibe some of the values, beliefs and practices that are hitherto unknown or considered to be alien and unacceptable to one another. In this regard therefore, Kehinde's character bears a resemblance to most characters in Cyprian Ekwensi's city books that are usually free and uninhibited in interacting and affiliating with people of different backgrounds with

completely different beliefs and idiosyncrasies. This seems to be for Ekwensi, one of the realities of city dwelling to which every city dweller must succumb and obey.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, young Kehinde is totally detribalised. She is bold, courageous, determined, individualised and apparently adventurous. In spite of the stiff opposition by her parents, especially her father, she not only allows a romantic relationship to blossom between her and a Yoruba neighbour in the city, she also goes ahead to marry him. And while her father languishes in prison having been found guilty of meting out an unwarranted assault on his would-be Yoruba in-laws, Kehinde moves into her husband's house and promptly gets pregnant for him in defiance of her parents' disapproval. Kehinde's life epitomises the influence of the city on its dwellers. It brings to the fore one of the many outcomes of city dwelling demonstrating the capacity of the city to modify, radically change and create a fresh worldview for the people that inhabit it especially the young and the easily impressionable. The reader imagines that should anything go wrong with Kehinde's husband or marriage in future, she may not have problems coping with living in the city as a single parent, just like Adaku or Mama Abby for her philosophy seems to be 'live as the city lets you.'

In *Everything Good Will Come*, the heroine is shaped not only by the living condition of Lagos but also by her exposure to western ideas and values having spent a considerable number of years in England both as a student and as a practising lawyer. Her character is also unique because she is highly educated, intelligent, experienced and well exposed. She admits that some of the ideas she previously held were altered as a result of her sojourn in England including her position on who should take the blame in a case of rape. She confesses that while she was once sympathetic to the widely held view in Nigeria that some women facilitate and encourage the commission of rape through indecent dressing, her interaction with foreigners in England thought her to believe that "nothing a woman does justifies rape" (78). The heroine is also not shy to admit that she returned to Nigeria with her "head full of English books" and that "coming home to Nigeria was like moving back to the fifties in England" (106).

In attempting a critical assessment of her character particularly against the backdrop of determining the influence of the city in shaping her attitude and general disposition to people and her environment, her confessional statements and hard stance declaration that she "was ready to tear every motion …about women" (204) and that she "would not let go until" she "was heard" (204), provide a basis for the reader to argue that her character and

idiosyncrasies do not appear to have emanated from the environment of Lagos; neither can the city be credited with having influenced her in very significant ways. However, in what may be tantamount to self-contradiction, Enitan insists that her new disposition to life and issues has no bearing on her newly acquired foreign values arguing that:

> It wasn't that I no longer belonged, that I'd become a stranger. Being overseas never changed what I instinctively knew before I left. What had changed was other people's tolerance for me (146).

However, this claim is hardly believable given the rigidity and sometimes extremity that attends her conduct in the novel. While it is fair for a modern woman to want to correct some perceived wrong notions about women, especially which the male-dominated society seems to have entrenched or encouraged over a long period of time, her method of "tearing" such notions is controversial and one which cannot be easily situated as having a link to the behaviour of the city. The heroine's name, Enitan, which in Yoruba language means "a person of history" may have been deliberately chosen to suit the design of the author. If this is so, perhaps, Enitan must make history by bringing about radical changes in the way women are perceived and treated in Nigeria only that such radical changes may not be taking place on account of the heroine's sojourn in the city. Her remark, upon moving over to her late mother's house to begin life as a single parent is not only worrisome but also not typical of a city dweller especially in view of the fact that Enitan has not gone through economic pressure in the city to warrant her being frustrated:

> These days, I stretched. I spread my legs wide on my sofa, flung my arms wide over the back. I lay like animal hide on my bed, face up, face down. Niyi was so tall, I'd always thought he deserved more space. The shrinkage I experienced was never worth it (335).

Notwithstanding the confusion regarding the heroine's character and the role of the city in moulding or influencing it, her character succeeds in admonishing women in the city to strive to possess excellent administrative and managerial skills which will imbue them with the capacity to become relevant in the scheme of things in the city. This is demonstrated in the way she successfully takes control of her father's law chamber and doing so in spite of her delicate pregnancy. She functions in the chamber not just as a lawyer but also as the administrative head of the office managing, coordinating and controlling all her father's staff.

The influence of the city in moulding and shaping good or bad character traits is best demonstrated through Sheri Bakare, the heroine's closest friend in *Everything Good Will*

Come. Sheri is an unlucky character as virtually everything about her circumstance evokes pity including her confused family history. Born of a European mother and a Nigerian father who takes her away from her English mother at a tender age and brings her to Nigeria to be raised by his illiterate mother; Sheri's life appears jinxed from the beginning. To make matters worse, she is raised in "downtown Lagos;" where people beat up others "for ten naira alone" (174). Hence, by the time she grows to adulthood, her mind is completely warped which is only a logical and expected progression from her adolescence. The author provides a reason for Sheri's love for adventure:

> Sheri did not know her own mother. …She lived in a house opposite her Alhaja's fabric store. She went to a school where children didn't care to speak English … she helped Alhaja in her store and knew how to measure cloth (38).

With this background, the city seems to be responsible for preparing her for the curious way she conducts herself throughout the novel. She claims to be 'crazy' and the heroine's mother describes her as *omo ita*, meaning 'street child.' Sheri is also credited with knowing all the rude sayings as an adolescent as she often strikes her bottom out without prompting to dance to any loud music. She takes delight in being noticed and gets away with whatever wrong she commits and says. Although she has the benefit of education, she chooses not to earn a living by it as an adult preferring the relatively easy life of a beauty queen and living off men as a "sugar girl" before Enitan encourages her to believe in herself and her ability to eke out a living from her sweat. Sheri never contemplates marriage throughout the novel because her life has been dogged by misadventures one of which results in her losing her chance of getting pregnant. As an adolescent and largely due to what the heroine describes as her "gra-gra" behaviour, a total disregard for decorum, Sheri becomes a victim of rape that results in an unwanted pregnancy which she attempts to forcefully remove by inserting a hanger on herself thereby permanently damaging her womb and condemning herself to a lifetime of infertility.

One critical issue in analysing Sheri's character particularly against the backdrop of the misfortune that defines and characterises her life is the culpability of the city in Sheri's misfortune. The circumstance of her upbringing appears to point an accusing finger at the city. The environment where she spends her childhood and adolescent years – the city of Lagos, seems to have contributed a great deal in moulding and shaping Sheri's character traits and pattern of behaviour. Therefore it seems that the negative values of the city inculcate equally negative tendencies in her. Thus, Sheri is vain, frivolous, lackadaisical,

wayward, rude, excessively fun-loving, loose and pathetic. She puts the blame for all her misdemeanour on the city when she sensationally declares that "after what my eyes have seen? If I'm not crazy, what else will I be?" (174).

However, beyond the wrong values the city may have impacted on Sheri as a growing child, two important sources of character formation are worthy of consideration. One is Sheri's immediate family background and the second is her inherent attributes as a human being. There are enough indications in the novel to suggest that Sheri does not benefit from the usual parental guidance and direction required for a normal growing child. She spends the greater part of her formative years with her grandmother. This already creates a generational problem for her since the old woman is understandably not in tune with current trends in properly raising a child of Sheri's generation. Besides, the grandmother is also a widow with a myriad of life's challenges to contend with. In addition, it is not surprising that Sheri's circumstance fails to witness a turnaround when her grandmother dies and she moves in with her step-mothers because it is a polygamous setting where each of the wives is more pre-occupied with the survival of her own children and Sheri's own biological mother is far away in England. Once, the heroine, Enitan, is baffled by her friend's many excesses and she enquires if Sheri's stepmothers ever caution her to which Sheri replies that all it ever requires of her to do in order to be left alone to behave as she pleases is simply to "kneel" for her stepmothers.

Sheri's utterances and general conduct in the novel also suggest the presence of some inherent flaws in her nature. Apart from the fact that a stronger person may have confronted and surmounted some of the challenges that threaten to undermine her sense of responsibility and decorum, Sheri carelessly wastes whatever good opportunity that comes her way as the following paragraph taken from a letter she writes to Enitan suggests:

> […] My father still says I'm not trying enough. He wants me to be a doctor. How can I be a doctor when I hate sciences? Now I have to […] take lessons in Phi, Chem and Bi. I think I will go mad (56).

Notwithstanding her low estimation of her potential, she manages to get to the university where she studies education but her lack of determination and unwillingness to make effort renders her not good enough for the classroom and she never puts her certificate to any concrete use after her graduation.

In spite of Sheri's flaws and the waywardness that characterises her early life however, she is a likeable personality. She is a loving, caring, homely, motherly and passionately affectionate individual. She is also a devoted and loyal friend to the heroine who constantly refers to her as her oldest and closest friend. Not surprisingly therefore, with Enitan's support and advice, Sheri eventually gives up a life of waywardness without having to leave the city as she establishes a charity organisation for children and becomes a thoroughly dignified woman at the close of the novel which serves as a vindication for the image of the city for it proves that the character of the individual city dweller and their pattern of behaviour has more to do with the personal choices of the individual than with the vagaries of the city.

Arinola, the mother of the heroine in *Everything Good Will Come*, is one of those characters who find it difficult to survive in the city. Her character places a heavy indictment on the city largely because her entire life in the world of the novel is a study in misery and unhappiness. She appears to have come under such intense pressure in the city that most times, she is hysterical, harsh, difficult, boring and impatient in addition to being an incurable nag. Arinola has the misfortune of losing her only son to the sickle cell disease early in her marital life and she blames her husband for being partly responsible for her loss due to what she perceives as the man's uncaring attitude and penchant for leaving home for long hours without reasonable explanation for doing so.

It seems arguable also that the city may be blamed for making Arinola's husband insensitive to his wife's pain and agony for he is always 'busy' and never seems able to spend sufficient time with his family. Although her constant accusation that her husband is a philanderer is proven to be correct later in the novel with the sudden appearance of a hitherto secret son from an illegal marriage, Arinola does not make efforts to mend her marriage. Rather than attempt to save her marriage from collapse, she takes to religious fanaticism thereby exposing the city again not only as a haven for religious charlatans, but also as an entity populated by foolish and gullible residents who are easily hoodwinked into surrendering their hard earned money on the altar of hypocrisy and falsehood. Arinola justifies her effort at seeking refuge in religion thus:

> Imagine the pain for a child? He would scream and scream and we couldn't touch him. I couldn't touch my son. For what? For a man who wouldn't be kept. Going out all the time, as if my son didn't exist […] He said I was angry all the time. Of course I was angry […] Never make sacrifices for a man [...] Pray you never know

> what it means to have a sick child […] I am not an ignorant woman. There isn't a mother in the world who wouldn't believe that faith can heal her child after medicine has failed […] (177-178).

Having found herself in this agonising situation and especially with the eventual death of the child, Arinola becomes understandably erratic and impossible. However, notwithstanding the failure of her religious zeal and fanaticism to prevent her son from dying, Arinola allows herself to continue to be used by religious charlatans in the city even after discovering that the church is interested in her money only. Gradually but steadily, she sinks deeper into depression, misery, disease and untimely death. Arinola's life and death constitute a burden on the city portraying it as an entity that visits its inhabitants with vicissitudes without providing escape routes for them. The burden of the city is further compounded by the author's description of Arinola's personality as "reserved" and "aloof" (177). The submission of the author seems to be that individuals like Arinola may not have the hope of faring well in the city especially because, to Arinola's credit, she is honest, forthright and down to earth. Despite the fact that the heroine is her only surviving child, she does not over-indulge her and neither does she encourage her to be insolent to her father. She insists on her daughter apologising to her father over a misdemeanour even when she is no longer on speaking terms with the man. In this respect, Arinola epitomises the true African woman who is always willing to give the man his due respect. Perhaps, Arinola is a genuine victim of the vagaries of the city; maybe the city truly deserves all the blame for her numerous woes in the novel. Or, is it possible that Arinola is first and fundamentally a victim of her own innate weaknesses, her reticence, docility, lack of foresight and general inaction?

Grace Ameh is arguably the happiest and most fulfilled woman in the novel and her life and activities celebrate and glorify the city. A seasoned journalist, writer, wife and mother, Grace is brave, intelligent, hardworking, focused and determined. She is also compassionate, responsible and dutiful at the home front. Although her character is not well developed enough to enable the reader to gain an insight into how her mind works, how she runs her home and is able to combine her journalism career with her domestic responsibilities without any of them suffering neglect, there is enough indication in the novel to suggest that she succeeds in managing the two because she is firm, skilful and yet flexible. Grace believes in moderation. She appears to know when to be firm, rigid and insistent as different from when to be soft and even plead for mercy. For example, the

same Grace who tells Enitan that the reason why she enjoys the support of her family as a journalist and activist is because she "wouldn't have it any other way" (262), also reveals to the heroine that she did not hesitate to beg the men of the state security service for her freedom when she was being held by them. She states further that she does not believe in foolish heroics and that she makes no pretences about it.

> I was at Shangisha last night, State Security Service headquarters […]. They took me to Shangisha to explain why I made mention of a military coup in a work of fiction. I begged them. What else was I to do with philistines? […] I begged them on my knees" (238-239).

Later on she explains:

> Those men I begged at Shangisha, they could easily have harmed me [...]. Make no mistake, I am not about to be recognized posthumously […]. I may not be able to write freely with the threat of treason over my head, but I cannot write if I'm dead, eh?" (263).

Similarly, she counsels the heroine to "use" her "voice to bring about change" and to "stand with others" because, according to her, if the heroine chooses to do it all on her own, she may end up being "nothing but another victim" (263). It is instructive that when Grace notices Enitan's extreme approach, she does not hesitate to tell Enitan that – "your views are impractical" (301). Grace appears to be a very strong character in the novel. She seems to be a character strong and fit enough to survive in the city. It does not come as a surprise therefore that Grace not only survives in the city, but she also does so without suffering undue pressure, frustration or unhappiness. Grace is an accomplished city dweller, wise to the city's ways, able to easily adapt to prevailing circumstances, and above all, careful, moderate and reasonable in all her quests in the city, which, perhaps, is the secret of her continuous survival and happiness in the city.

Although one of the major flaws in *Swallow* is the lack of proper development of characters which results in the reader hardly knowing them; nevertheless, Tolani Ajao, the heroine in the novel, comes across as being calm, amiable, decent, loyal and dependable though also fragile and sometimes confused. Tolani's life is defined by average. She is averagely educated (with a diploma), she is relatively young (in her late twenties) and she has an ambition that can be described as moderate – just to earn a living in a city where it seems the majority of residents are in a rat race for wealth. Tolani does not exhibit any of the usual negative tendencies of city dwellers. She focuses on her career as a secretary in a bank and is determined, initially at least, to give all her best to the promising relationship she believes she has with her boyfriend, Sanwo, in the hope of settling down to a fulfilling

life as wife and mother. Towards achieving this objective, she is loyal and completely devoted to her boyfriend throughout the novel despite Sanwo's persistent refusal to take concrete steps towards formalising their relationship. Like most city dwellers, Tolani is not born in the city. She comes from the countryside to Lagos to get an education and earn a living but her sojourn in the city proves to be an unsuccessful one by the time the story ends.

Beginning with her childhood which she does not spend in the city, Tolani's life has always been drab, colourless and without excitement perhaps as a result of the circumstances of her birth. Her supposed father is impliedly sterile, a situation that makes her conception, birth and paternity subjects of secrecy having been arranged between two brothers. Hence, Tolani is an only child and the truth about her paternity is concealed from her even by her mother. Also, there is neither deep love nor fondness between the heroine and the man she is made to believe is her father just as she does not enjoy special attention or affection from her biological father who is regarded as her uncle. Although there is no clear indication in the novel to suggest that Tolani's family history plays a significant role in the drabness that characterises her life in the city but her unrelenting search for true love and affection evidenced by her total devotion to her boyfriend and constant reference to her mother as the only one she has suggests the existence of a vacuum even if only in her subconscious.

It can be argued that her wish and sometimes desperation to fill this vacuum is responsible for her being seemingly oblivious of the glitz of the city thereby hindering her chances of being a proper partaker in the frills of city life. Even at her place of work where indolence characterises the daily lives of some of her colleagues who "worked as slowly as civil servants, shifting paper" (15), while others engage in extra-official activities such as gossiping, bickering, religious fanaticism, rumour-mongering and philandering, Tolani chooses not to go with the crowd. She dedicates herself to the duty officially assigned to her, typing debt notices even as she wonders why the bank worries to send the notices since they "never got replies" (15).

Apart from living a decent life in the city, Tolani never forgets her mother whom she regularly writes and sends money until she loses her job. The cordial relationship she cultivates and maintains with her neighbours such as Mrs. Durojaiye and Mama Chidi is commendable and the respect and decorum she demonstrates in her interactions with the

two women is incredible in view of the fact that coldness is a major characteristic of city life. In a city where neighbours hardly know one another; Tolani not only knows her neighbours well enough to be able to recognise and bring back home one of her neighbours' children who has been presumed dead, but she also remains close enough to them to have felt obliged to personally visit and bid them farewell on the eve of her departure from the city to the countryside presumably to spend her vacation. Also, like a responsible and sensitive young woman who is not yet married, Tolani worries about the image and impression she creates in the minds of her neighbours through her general conduct. Hence, she insists that her boyfriend accord respect to her neighbours while ensuring that she also remains steadfast in ensuring that she is not wayward and that her neighbours know and recognise only one man as her love interest.

In spite of these and many other virtues of the heroine however, she fails to make headway in the city and has to return to the countryside at the end of the novel. She frequently suffers from confusion and is perpetually in a state of dilemma. In the city, Tolani's mind oscillates between accepting and refusing to courier drugs. Although her initial reaction of rejecting the idea is sharp and direct; but perhaps as a result of the problems she begins to encounter at her place of work, she rescinds her earlier decision and goes as far as practising how to swallow drugs before she changes her mind again. Similarly, her attitude to religion portrays her as a confused person. Earlier in the novel, she claims she has neither faith nor interest in religion and that her decision to honour the invitation of a colleague to worship with him at his church is simply to appreciate him for standing by her in the office. However, as the service progresses, she storms out of the church in childish anger swearing never to have anything to do with the church again and claiming to have been disgusted by the pastor's demand for offering and tithes.

Ironically however, it is in the same church she claims she receives the inspiration not to get involved in drug trafficking. This leaves the reader wondering how a church the heroine despises so much could have such significant positive influence on her. Also at the end of the novel, she tells her mother that the God she wishes to worship is a "she." She declares: "[...] and she looks exactly like me. That's the God I'm trying to believe in now" (237). She exacerbates her confused state of mind when she states that:

> I hadn't thought my philosophy through. Maybe God created us. Maybe we created God. Maybe we existed to worship God. I didn't even know for sure [...] (238).

Her inability to make up her mind about serious issues concerning her life extends also to her love life. After what appears to be a break-up between her and Sanwo, her boyfriend in the city, Sanwo later traces her to her village where he apologises for his past mistakes and explains that his financial instability has been responsible for his failure to meet her expectation and assures her of his readiness to go ahead with their marriage plans having secured a paying job in the city. "Affording it, that's what bothered me" (254), he further explains to her and she responds by stating that she is no longer angry with him (253). Sanwo returns to the city after they promise to see each other soon. Surprisingly however, she declares shortly after Sanwo's departure that:

> One day I might settle down, and it was typical that he would meet some woman after me and end up as her wonderful husband (258).

This perpetual state of confusion on the part of the heroine, her failure to have a firm grip on her emotion and a seeming lack of effort at directing her mind and channelling her energy towards a purposeful course is perhaps at the root of her failure to achieve stability in the city. It appears that the heroine is not only physically weak but also mentally not alert enough to cope with the fast pace in the city and abandoning the city seems an expected consequence for her. Perhaps, the befitting climax to the perpetual confusion that seems to dominate the heroine's psyche is her indecision at the close of the novel as regards which place, between the city and the countryside, she should make her permanent place of residence. It is not clear at the end of the novel whether Tolani will stay back permanently in the village and "do something together" (253) with her mother or whether she will "see" Sanwo "soon" in the city. Her contradictory submissions that "the furniture had to be sold" (255), and later "the furniture in the flat, he could send to me by lorry, for my severance pay, I would come to Lagos..." (255) are just typical, unreliable musings of someone in constant dilemma which cannot be taken seriously. She confesses that "my thoughts were running helter-skelter" (256).

Thus, while Tolani has the credit for being a thorough-bred home girl, she does not appear to possess enough of the qualities required of her to survive in the city. She appears not to be strong and does not seem to be a very determined person. Although she is pleasant, decent, respectful and unassuming; she seems to lack the energy, drive, doggedness, creativity and ingenuity of a city dweller; hence, her failure to survive, influence or be significantly influenced by the city.

Rose Adamson appears to be a victim of the vagaries of the city although her family history and personal innate tendencies contribute to making her life irrevocably tragic. As an individual, Rose is difficult, cantankerous, frivolous, warped, wayward, extravagant and greedy. It is not clear in *Swallow* whether Rose is born and raised in the city or whether she comes to the city as an adult. What is clear, however, is that she has been raised by an irresponsible and wayward mother and that the circumstance of her upbringing does not predispose her to a decent living having been solely raised by a mother who has children by several men including her own son, and who teaches her daughters how to attract the attention of men from adolescence. It is little wonder that as a working class, yet to be married young woman in a permissive city like Lagos; Rose's inglorious philosophy is to change the men she sleeps with as frequently as she pleases depending on their capacity or failure to meet her financial and other frivolous expectations. Rose's journey to drug trafficking and untimely death begins very early in the novel when she is suddenly relieved of her position at the Federal Community Bank where she works as secretary to a randy manager, Mr Salako. The true circumstance surrounding her sack is not revealed in the novel as insubordination is Salako's official reason for relieving his secretary of her job. The fact that the atmosphere in the office has always been characterised by rumour mongering and bickering does not help matters either as different and conflicting accounts of what actually transpires between Rose and her boss are given.

However, it is implied that Rose's misfortune may not have been unconnected with an office romance gone sour. Her tragedy finds perfection in her concentration on exploring supposedly easier ways of surviving in the city such as living off men rather than channelling her efforts at searching for another job or seeking other decent means of earning a living in the city. It is hardly surprising that a mere pair of shoes bought for her by a man she hardly knows but whom she assumes has a lot of money to spend on her, is enough to entice her into starting a love affair with OC Okonkwo, the man who later introduces her to drug trafficking.

> Her troubles started with the brown loafers, not because she'd lost her job. Bad things had happened to Rose before. She handled them by arguing, defending herself, drinking beer or eating a bowl of pepper soup. Never did her solution come from unexpected generosity (65).

It is arguable therefore, that greed and wilful irresponsibility are at the core of Rose's misfortune, notwithstanding the fact that her claim of not having a family to depend on

may be genuine and believable especially with the uneasy relationship between her and Violet, her sister and the only blood relation she has in the city. Rose discountenances the support and wise counsel of the heroine who urges her to believe that it is possible for her to find another job. Atta seems to be using Rose's misfortune to counsel women who live in the city to avoid the temptation to want to use their gender as a tool for survival in the city rather than engage in decent means of livelihood. Rose's life and tragic death appear to be the author's way of showing disapproval of women who have a tendency to view their gender as providing for them a means of escape from the challenges of city life. Atta seems to be positing that a disastrous consequence such as the one that befalls Rose always awaits such women.

It is worthy of note however that Rose possesses many admirable qualities all of which are unfortunately overshadowed by the vagaries of the city and her personal failures. She is capable of demonstrating incredible tenderness, humility and remorse. In what turns out to be her parting words to her colleague, friend and flatmate, Rose's commendable humility comes to the fore:

> I take God beg you my sister, sorry I misbehaved, eh? My whole life has been one disappointment after another, sometimes, I don't know how to react. No vex eh? (217).

Rose is also caring and forgiving. In spite of her mother's irresponsibility and lack of care for her children, Rose criticises her sister, Violet, for maltreating their mother insisting that the now old woman should be properly taken care of especially when she falls ill. Perhaps, the greatest of Rose's virtues is that she is a loyal friend; she is also dependable and trustworthy. She pays her rent regularly and defends her friend whenever necessary. However, Rose makes a mistake in the city and it proves catastrophic and tragic.

In *Swallow***,** Mrs. Durojaiye is a divorcee, a midwife and neighbour to the heroine and her flatmate in the city. She is portrayed in the novel as a strict, hardworking, decent, but lonely and miserable woman whose unhappy circumstance is further worsened by the encumbrances of children. Atta's aim in creating Mrs. Durojaiye's character appears to be to underscore the peculiar challenges confronting women in the city. Mrs. Durojaiye is divorced and has three sons, the first two of whom she sends to live with their father when the financial burden of taking care of all the children becomes too heavy for her to bear. Her life is a study in suffering, perseverance, endurance and limitless unhappiness. The circumstances surrounding her estrangement with her husband are not made known in the

novel just as there is no information about her background, family history or previous experience in or outside the city. Significantly however, the reader gains an insight into her pattern of behaviour and personal idiosyncrasies through the way she handles her sons and through her interaction with the heroine who reports that Mrs. Durojaiye regularly beats her sons, hardly smiles at her neighbours and glares at their visitors ostensibly to judge their appearance.

Thus, Mrs. Durojaiye is impliedly not only strict but frustrated as well. The heroine's account of Mrs. Durojaiye's behaviour also suggests that the woman's perpetual unhappiness is partly as a result of the harsh realities of city life especially for a single parent who has to struggle to maintain not just herself but also her children. Although she is described as the only car owner living in the heroine's block of flats, further description of the car reveals that it has "broken reverse lights" (p. 54) and that "she must have bought it when times were good" (54-55). Her life is dominated by daily struggle that seems to hold no hope of respite. This passage captures the heroine's perception of Mrs. Durojaiye' situation:

> She had been fighting for a long time, to feed her sons and keep her job. She had probably fought her husband and in-laws. Why else was she alone? What I knew for sure was that I didn't want to be like Mrs. Durojaiye, that tough and lonely. She was so tough [...] (59).

It is to Mrs. Durojaiye's credit however, that in a city where people easily resort to unwholesome methods of solving perceived problems, She holds her head high. She neither flirts nor seeks refuge in religion. At no time does she bring a man to her home despite the fact that she has the freedom to do so which goes to show that despite the limitless freedom existing in the city, morally upright residents still abound there and that it is possible for the inhabitants of the city to exercise control over their lives even in the face of the well known vagaries of the city. Her conduct contrasts with the behaviour of many women in the city like Mrs. Odunsi, who, despite being married, freely sleeps with high society men she comes across (97). Also commendable is Mrs. Durojaiye's refusal to be lured by Rose into the business of drug trafficking especially at a time when there are problems at Mrs. Durojaiye's work place bordering on irregular payment of salaries and strikes. Although Rose does not confide in Tolani when she decides to approach the elderly woman to try to convince her to join in the drug trade, the heroine finds out that OC Okonkwo, the drug baron has sent Rose after Mrs. Durojaiye but that the woman has

bluntly refused to get involved in the shady business. It can be argued, therefore, that Mrs. Durojaiye's life, attitude and especially comportment in the city regardless of her woes, are a testimony to the presence of calm and forthright individuals in a city believed to be largely populated by desperados. Also notwithstanding her near permanent sorrowful mien, Mrs. Durojaiye manages to be friendly, understanding, nice, supportive and even humorous from time to time.

In the final analysis, Atta's works concentrate on examining the condition of women living in the city. It is worthy of note that Atta's two novels end without their respective heroines having stable emotional relationship. While Enitan Taiwo in *Everything Good Will Come* moves out of her matrimonial home on the excuse that her husband denies her freedom to host NGO meetings in their home, Tolani Ajao in *Swallow* breaks up with her boyfriend because she believes it has taken the man an unduly long time to marry her. The two books are also concerned with relatively young women and their struggle to survive, establish themselves and carve a niche for themselves in the seemingly cruel city of Lagos. Thus, both books do not deal with the masses. They do not focus on the plight of the urban poor who have to contend with overcrowding or who live in slums and have filth as constant companion. Atta's heroines are relatively big girls who can afford to live in a duplex or a flat in a choice area of the city, even if it is courtesy of parental support in Enitan's case, or can afford to pair up with a colleague to share a flat in Tolani's case.

Similarly, Atta's heroines and a majority of the characters that people her books have some level of education. They are not illiterates and to a very large extent, this ensures that the problems and challenges they face in the city go beyond mundane issues such as feeding or paying house rent. It can be argued therefore that two distinct attributes that distinguish Atta's works from those of other urban novelists are that she tends to be elitist in her approach and she does not seem to hold the institution of marriage quite as sacrosanct for women living in the city. Her position seems to be that if marriage works out well for women who reside in the city, so be it but if it does not, the modern woman living in the city is already in possession of all it takes to survive without the man by virtue of her living in the city. There also seems to be a subtle suggestion in Atta's works that the more educated and economically empowered the woman is, the greater the chances of her surviving in the city. In other words, a city-dwelling woman may need education and economic empowerment to survive in the city much more than she may need a man.

Everything Good Will Come is decidedly elitist. It is concerned with the lives of the privileged who, despite their relative advantage, still face life problems in the city. This emphasises the fact that the problems that come with living in the city are not limited to urban poverty or the struggle to earn a living in the city**.** *Everything Good Will Come* bears testimony to the fact that there are many other problems that can threaten the happiness or even existence of the privileged in the city. Such problems include modern polygamy, high rate of divorce, separation, rape, emotional instability, political crisis and the city as a haven for fake and adulterated drugs and religious charlatans among others.

*Swallow***,** on the other hand, focuses on the challenges confronting the middle class residents of the city. Tolani has a little education, at least enough to guarantee her average comfort but the city presents her with fresh and unexpected challenges. At the end of Atta's two novels, the heroine in *Everything Good Will Come* succeeds in getting a firm grip on the city and her life owing largely to her privileged family background but the same cannot be said of Tolani of *Swallow* who leaves the city for her birth place and whose future remains gloomy. "I was a failure, a complete one" (253), she laments piteously at the end of the novel. Therefore, whereas *Everything Good Will Come* ends with the heroine being excited and fulfilled although her grounds of fulfilment may be questionable and her happiness not wholly believable, she does not appear to be overwhelmed by her problems. She does not abandon the city. It must not be forgotten however that Enitan is born and raised in the city. Although she introduces her parents to the reader as having come from different regions of the country, at no time does she visit any of her two parents' native or ancestral homes. Therefore, Enitan seems to be a complete city woman. Perhaps, this factor explains why the thought of abandoning the city for the countrywide can never have arisen since she knows no countryside to run to in the face of the city's challenges. Tolani, on the other hand, is born and raised in the "farmland;" hence, she decides to retrace her steps back home when the going gets too tough in the city.

It is also important to closely examine the approaches and perspectives of Emecheta and Atta as Nigerian women novelists on the city. In Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, all rural ethics are transferred and domesticated to city ethics. The heroine becomes almost without norm. Where, for instance, does Atta's character get her attitude from? It can only be explained as a city attitude because it is unlikely that a woman in the village would have the nerve to disagree with her husband over NGO issues if at all there are NGOs in the village. It is a similar situation in *The Joys of Motherhood* with Emecheta's character, Nnu

Ego who discovers her hitherto hidden strength in the city. The capacity to run the home in the absence of her husband is a feat Nnu Ego would not have believed was possible in the village. The environment in the city appears to be one in which all inhabitants, irrespective of gender, must strive for their survival. Also, beyond acquiring a survivalist instinct in the city, Emecheta's character, like Atta's, becomes bold and confident in the city. Nnu Ego becomes bold enough to resist wife battery. She goes as far as hitting her husband back without fear and at a point in the novel, she courageously refuses to share her already overcrowded single room with her husband's new wife. Another of Emecheta's characters, Adaku, does in the city what is totally unimaginable in the village setting. She wilfully abdicates her matrimonial duties and gleefully announces her decision to embrace a life of single parenthood. To these characters therefore and by extension their authors, women have to live in the city as the city lets them. Similarly, as it is with Atta's heroines, who are estranged from their love interests at the end of their stories, Emecheta's Nnu Ego is separated from her husband at the end of *The Joys of Motherhood.* She abandons the city and relocates to the village, an action similar to what happens to Tolani in *Swallow.*

Notwithstanding the similarities in the two women authors' perceptions and responses to the city, their works differ in many significant respects. Atta's heroines do not die in her works unlike Emecheta whose heroine succumbs to misery and death. Thus, Atta's works tend to offer a greater hope for the survival of women in the city although only if the women are educated or economically empowered. If they are not, they may have to abandon the city for the countryside to find their feet. Another major difference in the works of the two authors is that Emecheta seems to worry about the lives of the ordinary, uneducated women who have to struggle for survival in the city while Atta's focus tends to be on the educated and modern women. This difference is undoubtedly a generational reality as reflected in the age gap between the two authors and also the periods of their works. Atta's works came out nearly two decades after Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and it is to be expected that the issues that worry the Nigerian women two or more decades ago have given way to fresh ones.

A corollary to the above point is that the issues treated by the two authors are essentially different. Emecheta appears to be more concerned with family issues than Atta. Whenever Emecheta's characters disagree with their spouses, they do so over family matters. Similarly, the problems that plague them in the city are directly linked to the survival of their families and it appears that they hold family kinship in very high esteem. Emecheta's

heroine, it seems, loses her balance and gives in to the depression that claims her life because she believes she has failed to secure the love and acceptance of her family. Atta, on the other hand, appears to be more concerned with 'modern' issues such as those bordering on career and self identity for the woman among others. She uses events in the lives of her characters to insist that these contemporary problems are weighty enough to be of concern to women and those who worry about women issues. These marked differences in the themes that dominate their writings are also accountable for the disparity in the class of their heroines. Hence, while Emecheta selects an ordinary woman from the village as her heroine, Atta goes for the highly educated modern woman whose exposure is beyond the shores of Nigeria to articulate her high profile concerns.

Furthermore, Atta makes a significant observation in *Swallow* that is worthy of consideration. She draws a brilliant comparison between the condition of women in the city and that of their counterparts residing in the countryside and concludes that although women are generally dominated and mostly treated unfairly by the men in the rural areas which is a good reason for more women to relocate to the city in search of freedom, menopausal women are however treated with greater respect and are freer from male domination in the village whereas the city does not appear to recognise differences in the ages of women that inhabit it neither does it set different conditions of living for the women on the basis of age. In other words, the city is not a respecter of age. Atta's heroine, Tolani, provides further insight into this revelation in her description of the status of her mother in the village:

> [...] my mother [...] had attained the status of women her age within the compound. She was almost a man, now that she was past her childbearing years. People in the compound valued her knowledge and experience and they respected what came out of her mouth. She settled arguments between neighbours, heard disputes over property and rent (246).

It is ironic that the city which seems to hold a greater capacity for the liberation of women from the stress and strain of difficult traditional practices of the countryside does not insulate them from the endless struggle for survival that characterises city life. The city does not seem to have a compassionate attitude towards women who live in it even when the women are at their advanced age. Mrs. Durojaiye in *Swallow* remains tormented by sundry problems in the city despite her age and status. Perhaps, the reason the city appears to be insensitive to gender difference in this regard is because to accord women a special treatment in recognition of the attainment of a certain age may be tantamount to giving

recognition to village tradition and thereby contravening the city ethic which thrives on individuality, anonymity, coldness and insensitivity.

Finally, both Emecheta and Atta seem to have a more positive perception of the city in relation to the fortunes of women than the male writers on the city. This is probably because the city tends to offer greater freedom to women than the village, notwithstanding the numerous challenges that confront women in the city. In this regard, Emecheta and Atta, as representatives of Nigerian female novelists on the city seem to agree with the submission of Joyce Carol Oates (1981) that the city promotes individuality and that it is a good enough reason for female writers to celebrate the city. If the freedom the city offers the Nigerian women is used positively, it may engender not only greater positive self-esteem for Nigerian women, it may also enhance their capacity to make meaningful contribution to national development as formidable individuals rather than as mere appendages to men.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Growing urbanisation and the persistent negative representation of the city in literature motivated this study. Through textual analysis of selected novels set in the city, the study examines the seeming symbolisation of the Nigerian city as representative of decadent modern Nigeria where the citizen's life is characterised by fruitless struggle, suffering and insecurity. It further examines the real impact of urban life on the Nigerian city dwellers especially what seems to be the conclusion of many writers of the city novel that philandering and extravagance reign supreme in the typical Nigerian city and that city people, most of whom are depicted as living in degradation and squalor, are largely vain preferring to pre-occupy themselves with sex, material possession and conspicuous consumption.

There have been a few instances in the past in which literature has generated a sharp reaction among the people of a particular environment suggesting that literature does influence behaviour but these instances have remained isolated cases. At other times, it has been largely a matter of conjecture. A memorable instance of how a work of art can concretely impact on attitude is the phenomenal influence of Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. Ernest Emenyonu (1991) recalls how the novel initially generated outcry and disdain among some Nigerians who perceived it as being capable of corrupting young people who were deemed to be innocent but highly impressionable:

> Appearing a year after Nigeria's independence, the novel became an embarrassment to some groups of Nigerians who feared that Jagua's portrait could be mistaken for a true picture of Nigerian womanhood. Consequently the novel was attacked by many groups. It was banned in some institutions of learning for fear that it would corrupt young minds. When an Italian film company, Ultra Films, approached the Nigerian Government in 1961 for 'facilities' to produce the film version of the novel, the Government imposed difficult conditions. Even then the issue had to go all the way to the Nigerian Parliament where the proposed filming was rejected and stopped. This action must have contributed in no small measure in creating the very high demand which the novel soon witnessed. In the process, the novel became extremely popular and attracted national and international attention. (*Studies on the Nigerian Novel*, 66).

In spite of this unusual reaction however, it is still difficult to establish if and how those who read the novel have been influenced by it. There is no significant evidence of the influence of the novel on the Nigerian populace in general and on those living in the city in particular either during the period immediately following the publication of the novel or thereafter.

However, a critical analysis of selected novels shows that urban experience has significant effect on what comes out as literature. This position is arrived at in view of the way writers seem to be writing about the city as their experience directs them. It is imperative to state that all the selected writers in this study have lived in the city at one time or another and that their urban experience seems to have greatly shaped their fiction. It is hardly controvertible for example that Ekwensi once lived in the heart of Lagos and that his personal experience in the city tends to shape his literary account of city life. Hence, this study affirms that most writers who choose the urban landscape as setting of their writing do so in order to render account of their personal experience or the experience of people they encounter in the city. This also partly explains why the principal motif in most of Ekwensi's city books is urban squalor and the degradation and corruption that accompany it.

Similarly, the publication of Achebe's *A Man of the People* coincided with the coup d'état and counter coup of 1966. In the novel, Achebe holds the Nigerian political class to ridicule and skilfully draws attention to the unhealthy political atmosphere in the city prophetically concluding that military coup is a likely consequence of the kind of recklessness that pervades the country. Kenneth Little (1980) records Achebe's assertion that "in addition to resuscitating a sense of pride in Africa's own achievements, it is the writer's duty to educate his African audience" (*The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature:* 4). Achebe believes that a writer should help his readers understand the nature of his environment, in this case the city; he holds that a writer "should help them more readily to understand the nature of Africa's problems and he should also, perhaps, suggest ways of solving them" (4). This is perhaps what he sets out to do in *A Man of the People* and although Little reports that the novel enjoys a wide circulation not only among the literati but also among the relatively uneducated masses, it is difficult to conclude that the novel actually influenced the attitude of the Nigerian citizens especially city dwellers in any particular way, even despite the fact that a military coup was actually followed by a

counter coup in Nigeria the same year the novel was published and in accordance with the prediction in the novel.

> I was not interested in legalistic traditional arguments just now, especially when they were calculated to delay things; a coup might be followed by a counter coup and then where would we be?" (165)

However, Achebe's city books have been influenced by his personal experience in the city. This is further evident in the way he places the principal focus on the conflict within the hero's conscience in *No Longer At Ease* where Obi Okonkwo, having graduated in England, returns to Lagos and is taken aback by the corruption in the city. He rejects the suggestion that he should accept 'things' as they are but remains pathetically idealistic rather than show a concrete will to turn 'things' around. The depiction of Obi Okwonkwo as being bitterly disillusioned and frustrated by his own inability to take up a stronger moral position appears to be a literary rendering of Achebe's experience in the city as regards what goes on in the city and the inability of well-meaning residents to make concrete positive changes.

Also of importance to the conclusion of this study is a revisit of claims by most observers of city life that the city induces its residents into making unhelpful decisions that leave negative consequences in their trail. It is hardly controvertible that the condition in the city easily predisposes its residents into making mistakes but the personal choices of city dwellers ultimately determine whether the city is heavenly or hellish for them. In other words, while the city exerts considerable influence on its residents in their day to day activities and especially in their struggle for survival, in-depth textual analysis suggests that the natural tendencies and personal idiosyncrasies of characters in the selected novels make greater contribution to the determination of their fate in the city. The choices made by individual characters in the world of selected novels transform some of them to glory and others to doom. This tends to weaken the Shakespearean submission of the helplessness of man in the face of incomprehensible forces in his environment and what seems to be Ekwensi's belief that the city is the villain and its residents mere victims. Ekwensi's aversion to the ways of the city is seen in the passage in which he describes the villagers' description of Jagua upon her return to the village from Lagos.

> The women fixed their eyes on the painted eyebrows and one child called out in Ibo 'Mama! Her lips are running blood' [...]. Jagua heard another woman say, 'she walks as if her bottom will drop off. I cannot understand what the girl has become' (69).

The climax of Ekwensi's rejection of the kind of enjoyment the city offers is evident in the way Jagua spends ten years in the city, prostituting and 'conquering' men only to come to the realisation that the only legacy the city can bequeath to her is a life of degradation; hence she makes what seems to be the wise decision in Ekwensi's opinion to return to the village.

> She wanted to go home now, back to Ogabu. She wanted to go to Krinameh to see if Chief Ofubara would still take her. She felt a deep hungry longing for her mother, Lagos for her, had become a complete failure. She must try and start life all over again, but not in Lagos (171).

Indeed, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that the old generation writers are wary of the city in spite of its capacity to give its residents limitless pleasure and abundant opportunities. A brief consideration of the way the selected novels of the old writers end may provide further insight into their disposition to the city and lend credence to this study's submission. At the end of *People of the City*, Ekwensi's hero, Amusa Sango and his newly wedded wife are set to flee the city. They are ready to relocate to the Gold Coast because they want "a new life, new opportunities" (120). It is only in far away Gold Coast that he and Beatrice the Second can hope to discover a new life and a new sense of peace; not in the city. In *Jagua Nana*, the heroine, Jagua Nana returns to the village to "start life all over again" (171); while in *Iska*, the heroine, Filia Enu, who refuses to leave the city has her life tragically terminated.

Similarly, Achebe's hero in *No Longer At Ease*, Obi Okwonkwo goes to jail at the end of the novel and in *A Man of the People*, the subject, Odili Samalu proposes to found a school in memory of his slain activist friend, Max, in his village, not in the city where Max lived, fought and died (166).

This disposition runs contrary to the attitude of contemporary novelists who permit the city the privilege of globalising the identity of their characters. In Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song*, the hero, Taneba Taneba returns to the city despite his previous unsavoury experience and in spite of the fact that he now suffers from a terminal disease. The impression the reader gets at the end of the novel is that Taneba will not abandon the city till he dies even when his circumstance does not suggest that there is something tangible for him to hold on to. In *Invisible Chapters*, the slum dwellers who are collectively the heroes of the novel celebrate their lives. They are also determined to remain in the city in spite of all odds. This tends to be a more positive disposition to the city which may find acceptance with the Marxist idea

of 'reflecting reality' in the environment as city dwellers are usually not inclined to abandoning the city in spite of the difficulties associated with city dwelling.

A Marxist critic, Georg Lukacs, cited in Selden & Wildowson (1993) insists that the novel reflects reality not by rendering its mere surface appearance, but by giving us "a truer, more complete, more vivid and dynamic reflection of reality." He believes people ordinarily possess a reflection of reality, "a consciousness not merely of objects but of human nature and social relationships." He wants a novel to conduct its reader "towards a more concrete insight into reality," which should transcend a merely "common-sense" apprehension of things. He submits that a literary work should reflect not individual phenomenon in isolation, but the full process of life "even when the reader is always aware that the work is not itself reality but rather "a special form of reflecting reality." In Lukacs' view therefore, a "correct reflection of reality will involve much more than the mere rendering of external appearances." He rejects mere 'photographic' representation and describes the truly realistic work as one which possesses an "intensive totality" that corresponds to the "extensive totality" of the world itself (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* pp. 75-76).

Nwosu's approach in *Invisible Chapters* suggests that he may have yielded to the persuasion of the Marxist theorist on what should be the role of literature in the society, although there is a visible lack of organisation in the novel to give credence to the declared good intention of the slum dwellers. Therefore, while the old generation writers seem to regard the city as a parasite capable only of offering superficial enjoyment but inherently harmful to its inhabitants, the contemporary writers appear to perceive the city as a celebration of humanity's continuous quest for civilisation and globalisation. Contemporary writers' submission seems to be that although the city is far from being perfect, but it is worthy of investing hope in. Hence, the slum dwellers in Nwosu's city appear undaunted in their continuous search for improvement in their living condition in the city.

On the perspective of women, the study shows that women novelists tend to regard the city in greater positive perspective than their male counterpart because they seem to see the city as bestowing on women a greater sense of self-worth. This is due to the condition of living in the city and especially the prevalent high cost of living which often compel women to become economically independent since the men are often unable to shoulder the family

responsibilities alone. More than that perhaps, the city atmosphere tends to offer women greater liberty to rebel against their age long domination by men and to insist on their views not only being heard but also being heeded in all spheres of human endeavour including family, political and right issues. In line with the new privileges created by the atmosphere in the city, the study shows what seems like a consensus among women writers that the city treats women differently from the way the countryside treats them and that women also conduct themselves differently in the city. This is exemplified in the way Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* wilfully chooses to live as a single parent in the city and also how the city turns Agary's heroine in *Yellow-Yellow*, Zilayefa, into a mere sex object in the hands of Admiral and how she liberates herself in the end. In the same vein, the study finds that women novelists tend to write about women in the city in ways that are different from the way their male counterparts depict women in the city. For example, Chinua Achebe's Clara in *No Longer at Ease* leans perennially (emotionally) on the protagonist, her love interest, despite her education and economic empowerment until the man calls off the relationship. Worse still, Cyprian Ekwensi's heroines in *Jagua Nana* and *Iska***,** Jagua Nana and Filia Enu respectively, live their entire lives gratifying the sexual needs of men and strategising on how to win their affection. But Sefi Atta's heroines in *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow* are formidable women determined to carve a niche for themselves in the city which they believe offers them a greater opportunity for self determination. Even Buchi Emecheta's heroine in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, deploys greater attention and energy towards struggling to ensure the survival of her family than worrying about how to make her husband love her or how she could please him.

However, the new orientation in the city which tends to define right issues in broad abstract terms and the tendency for women in the city to lose sense of the traditional role of men leading to a kind of 'you can do it yourself' instinct pose fresh dangers of eroding family kinship and creating or exacerbating divisions among individuals especially between men and women who reside in the city. Hence, Nwosu's kind of city where a genuine love relationship develops and culminates in marriage between Segilola and Ashikodi in *Invisible Chapters* holds a greater promise for the image of the city.

The study further shows that the society may be in danger of losing the face-to-face mode of interaction which exists in the countryside and enhances healthy living unless the city adopts some of the village values such as the spirit of communal living as espoused in *Invisible Chapters*. However, such a mode of interaction, as Nwosu appears to warn, must

not be anchored in ethnic affinity or social grade; but in sincere intention to positively affect the lives of others in the environment irrespective of their backgrounds or ancestry.

The city may also be in danger of worsening image crisis as more people will continue to throng it in search of employment and other opportunities which are believed to be available in the city but lacking in the countryside; but the positive disposition to the city by contemporary and women writers and the growing number of 'city children writers' (writers born and/or raised in the city) who make the city the setting of their work promises a greater prospect for a redeeming image of the city since the characters in such city novels are likely to have a globalised identity. Furthermore, more sustained efforts on the part of city administrators in addressing the various challenges of the city such as inadequate infrastructures; high unemployment rate and environmental degradation among others will make the city more liveable and engender a more positive attitude toward the city by writers and observers of city life.

Finally, it is important to state that a negative literary representation of the city is noticeable in all the selected texts as a majority of the characters can hardly be described as respectable. Even a contemporary writer like Nwosu who appears to celebrate the ethic of the city in his works is not under any illusion that the city has an acceptable image. What obtain in most of the texts are a defiant pride and an audacious, if not stubborn, hope by a majority of the characters of contemporary writers that the condition in the city may improve. Beyond hope, there also seems to be a stoic acceptance of the ways of the city essentially because the characters appear to have come to the conclusion that there is no better alternative outside the city. Taneba Taneba, the protagonist in Nwosu's *Alpha Song* is hardly a character to be proud of and there is nothing enviable about the lives of the slum dwellers in *Invisible Chapters.* Also, nearly all the texts depict a majority of the city dwellers as largely morally bankrupt in addition to being mere drifters without a clear sense of direction in the city in spite of the fact that some of them are 'highly' educated. Indeed, if there is to be a dominant opinion among writers who use the city as setting of their work, it will seem to be that the city is as enigmatic as it is phenomenal.

The women writers who also celebrate the city for the freedom it gives women are unable to show convincingly that women who live in the city are truly happier than their counterparts who reside in the countryside. Maria Cutrefelli (1983:3, cited in Kehinde and Mbipom, 2011:73) asserts that:

> The new characteristically urban figure of the male-unprotected, husbandless single woman has significantly taken shape: and [...] the consciously deliberate rejection of marriage on the part of an increasing number of urban women appears to be a courageous, indeed daring deed (*African Nebula*, Issue 3, June 2011).

The pertinent question, however, is how much joy do urban women truly derive from their city-given courage and bravery? How real for instance is the supposed fulfillment Sefi Atta's heroine claims to have at the close of *Everything Good Will Come*? What is the basis of her flaunted happiness? What about her heroine in *Swallow* who, at the end of the novel, is unable to decide whether to return to the city and continue with her meaningless struggle or remain in the village with her mother? The worst hit is perhaps Emecheta's heroine in *The Joys of Motherhood* who leaves the city a 'broken' woman and whose final death in the village actually began by instalment from the city.

What is clear from the perspective of the contemporary writers is that the city globalises the identity of its dwellers and that it is a quality worth celebrating. There is also an implied submission that the longer the characters stay in the city, the more likely they tend to view the urban environment as home as the mixing together of people from different backgrounds engenders new attitudes as well as fresh perspectives on issues and challenges. This may pave the way to a probable improved representation of the city in literature especially as more writers continue to view the city as the ideal setting for their work, and more importantly, as they become residents or citizens of the city.

All the selected texts fulfil the ideals of the literary theories adopted for this study. They all reflect the realities in the city in line with the Marxist ideology; in varying degrees, the writers, especially the contemporary and women writers celebrate the city in accordance with the postmodern posture and all of them advocate the kind of changes they consider necessary in the city in fulfilment of both the Marxist and feminist submissions.

For further study of the city in literature, it may be useful to proceed from the understanding that the city encourages its inhabitants' predisposition to making mistakes that sometimes prove catastrophic; but the personal choices of individual inhabitants of the city, more than the vagaries of the city, shape the final outcome of the destiny of residents.

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