SELF AND CULTURE IN NIGERIAN MIGRANT AND TRAVEL ETHNO-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POETRY IN ENGLISH

BY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by AYODEJI ISAAC SHITTU of the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, under my supervision.

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DEDICATED

to

My late mother,

Mary Shittu-Ajogbeje

Who could not wait

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ABSTRACT

Ethno-autobiographical poetry is a culturally constituted autobiographical poetry. Due to its subjectivity, it is regarded by critics as an unreliable construction of social history. Consequently, previous researches consider ethno-autobiographical poetry as essentially self-aggrandising, neglecting its form as a unique blend of both self and culture. Therefore, this study explored the cultural constitution of selected Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry, in terms of racism, ethos, and space, with a view to establishing its features as a source of social history.

The diachronic perspective of the Genre Theory, which emphasises the historical and dynamic function and features of a genre, is adopted to conceptualise autobiography as ethno-autobiography. The historico-biographical method was used to explore how self and culture are constructed in four collections of purposively selected Nigerian migrant autobiographical poems: Tanure Ojaide's *When it No Longer Matters Where You Live* (*No Longer Matters*), Femi Oyebode's *Master of the Leopard Hunt* (*Master*), Olu Oguibe's *Songs of Exile*, Uche Nduka's *The Bremen Poems*, and two collections of poetic travelogues: Odia Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems* (*London Letter*) *and* Remi Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America* (*Shuttlesongs*). The texts were subjected to critical textual analysis.

Nigerian migrant and travel ethno-autobiographical poetry depicts an interplay of racism, ethos, and space in the authors' self construction. In *Master*, racism is portrayed in the persona's treatment as a racial 'Other'; ethos is depicted in the appropriation of Benin mythical art and ancestral beliefs as identity schema and for interrogating the episteme of Euro-American geo-space. *Songs of Exile* depicts racism in the persona's hybridity and identity crisis, but ethos in the conflict between his African imagination and Americans' individualistic lifestyle, which results from his encounter with the geo-cultural space of exile as a post-colonial subject. *The Bremen Poems* relates the persona's loneliness and vulnerability as a racial outsider, whereas ethos is depicted in his conflicting feelings of nostalgia for the homeland and love for the exilic space of Bremen as a city of refuge. In *No Longer Matters*, exile is associated with racial discrimination, individualism and deceptive glamour while the homeland is portrayed as oppressive and squalid resulting in the persona's conclusion that neither geo-space is conducive for self realisation. In *London Letter*, Lagos and London are depicted as racially and socially stratified and filthy; ethos is portrayed in the persona's queries of Nigerian emigrants' Eurocentric disposition and their flamboyant lifestyles as citizens and immigrants within the geo-cultural spaces of Lagos and London respectively. In *Shuttlesongs*, racism is portrayed in the historic slave trade and racial discrimination occluded by modern America's glamour while ethos is depicted in America's liberal democracy, human rights, and African American cultural values; the persona encountered these during visits to America's historic sites and geo-cultural spaces.

The cultural constitution of selected Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry, in terms of racism, ethos, and space, is composed, respectively, of alterity, identity construction and epistemological orientation, and trans-spatiality. These features demonstrate ethno-autobiography's form as an expression of self and culture within the context of social history.

Key words: Ethno-autobiography, Nigerian migrant and travel poetry, Social history, Space, Self

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CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

In the past three decades, literary studies have been increasingly dominated by approaches that emphasize the social, historical, and political significance of literary works. This revival of historical approaches to literature and culture has been accompanied by severe critiques of past historiographies. These new approaches reject the positivist and orthodox Marxist traditions that regard literature as a mimetic reflection of an underlying "reality," the "internalist" histories that isolate the discipline from the surrounding culture, the Hegelian, organicist, and teleological generalisations of periods and cultures, reductive national perspectives, and, last but not least, histories dominated by "grand narratives" (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, 2002: 1). This development resurfaced after the cold war decades in which political approaches to literature fell out of favour, and re-emphasises the connection that exists between literature and social and political history.

Essentially, this approach to literature is, for instance, a consequence of the formalist critical view of literature as a-historical. To the formalist critic, literary texts do not have any connection with a particular time; rather, they are seen as universal and thus transcend history. Thus, as far as the formalist is concerned, there is no particular relationship between the historical context of the production and reception of a literary text. A text is seen as "aesthetically autonomous, having its own laws, being a world unto itself" (Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 2004:113). This school of thought was championed by formalist or New Critics like John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, W.K. Wimsatt and others. There have been at least three critical reactions to this perspective on the historical relevance of literary texts and creative production. These include the philological or what has been called 'background' criticism, the traditional historical scholarship, and the new historicist's perspectives.

Background critics argue in support of the historicity of literary texts and that it is necessary to investigate the circumstances that surround the production of a text because these circumstances are integral to the understanding of the text. To the background critics, these backgrounds may be biographical, linguistic, cultural or political. They are of the opinion that "knowledge of a literary text's historical

circumstances forms the basis for an understanding of that text" (Bennett and Royle, 2004:114). However, like New Critics, they argue that although the text is produced within a specific context, its literariness is separate from that context.

The traditional historical perspective, on the other hand, sees the historical quality of the literary text as contributory to the understanding of historical landmarks. To this school, literary texts can help in the understanding of the time in which such texts are set. Realist texts in particular are seen in this category as providing imaginative representations of specific historical moments, events or periods. However, this school of thought sees literary texts as subordinate in some respect to their historical context and "that literary texts provide undistorted 'reflections' of their time" (Bennett and Royle, 2004:114). This perspective has been described as the "'reflective' approach."

The last approach to the historicity of the literary text is connected with New Historicism and Cultural Materialism both of which relate to the historical dimensions of literary studies. These critical approaches became prominent in the early 1980s and are concerned with the notion that literary texts are bound up with other discourses and rhetorical structure. They see the text as part of a history that is still in the process of being written. In a way, the new historical perspective is different from the other perspectives on the relationship between the literary text and history. While the 'new critics', the 'background critics' and the 'reflectionists' perspective, though varying from each other in degrees, assume that "the categories 'literature' and 'history' are intrinsically separate" thereby creating a form of polarity between the two, new historical critics address the extent to which history is textual, thereby rejecting the autonomy of the literary text and also refuting the notion of the objectivity of interpretations. These critical perspectives define literary and historical discourses today.

For instance, from the separatist perspective, Rene Wellek (1961), in an essay entitled 'Literary Theory, Criticism, and History', argues that "literary study differs from historical study in having to deal not with documents but with monuments" and that the literary critic has "direct access to his object" whereas, the historian "has to reconstruct a long-past event on the basis of eye witness account" (Bennett and Royle, 2004: 115). The new historicist, however, argues that the production of literary texts is a cultural activity which is only different from other cultural activities and practices in the specific mode or formulation adopted. As Bennett and Royle (2004: 115) argue,

> No absolute distinction can be made between literary and other cultural practices […] Literary texts are embedded

> within the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed. But what is important […] is that these circumstances are not stable in themselves and are susceptible to being rewritten and transformed. From this perspective, literary texts are part of a larger circulation of social energies, both products of and influences on a particular culture or ideology.

History is, thus, not past but present. It is radically open and constantly being transformed and rewritten.

1.1 The ethnography of Nigerian literature

The historical and cultural approach to literature has been of very critical relevance to the post-colonial situation in sub-Saharan Africa. In Africa, literature is utilitarian, because it is inseparable from the social and political upheavals (Tanure Ojaide, 1996). It is an ideological tool with which happenings in the society are chronicled and critiqued. The writer is seen as the conscience of the society. This obviously took its cue from the traditional oral method of artistic performances which often comment upon and critique the social structure as a means of social education and interventions. Thus, the oral performers –court poets and historians, praise singers and story tellers– often function as the social critics in traditional societies. Their role is akin to that of modern literary critics and writers whose works centred primarily on evaluation of the polity. Therefore, African literature is seen in most cases as an alternative history. The social vision of African literature is acknowledged by Mazisi Kunene when he notes that it is normal for the African writer to integrate their social perspective with that of the society. According to him,

> The idea of integrating the artist's vision within a broad social experience becomes a normal and natural process that does not require rules for its application. Both the philosophic and artistic worlds fuse to produce a discipline that aims at affirming the social purpose of all expressions of human life. In short, the ideal of social solidarity is projected. (Quoted in Tanure Ojaide, 1996: 3)

Ojaide notes that African's socio-political and economic history "has a lot to do with the direction of writing in the continent" (1996: 75). Tracing the historical development of African poetry from the sixties and the integration of the social consciousness of the time by the artists, Ojaide observes:

> The poets of the 1960s were preoccupied with exhibiting African material culture and expressing their positions in a

> transition period. For many, it was in the context of culture conflict resulting from the choice to be made between traditional African culture and the new Western culture. In the later 1960s and 1970s many poets were involved in political satire as the new African leaders generally failed the aspiration of their people (77).

Writers do not write in a vacuum; their creative activities are situated and conditioned by certain experiences and factors. Therefore, literature is an interrogation of the social sphere either in fictional or biographical mode. For instance, the 21st century has been described as the age of autobiography. People seek to tell their own stories and reflections in a bid to either correct misrepresentations about them or as a means of self identification. The need for self-inscription and identification is felt more in the present world situation where globalisation and the resultant trans-acculturations and displacement have created serious identity problems. While narrating their own stories, writers incorporate social and cultural landmarks that are important to their identity formation. In other words, they inject certain details of the society life as they know or experience them. This, to a great extent, defines the cultural constitution and historicalness of such literature. As Ademola Dasylva and Remy Oriaku (2010:303) note, "every society has its means and method of chronicling events, and lives in a way peculiar to it." In Africa, the writer, both in the traditional and the contemporary societies, is seen and accepted as a spokesman of the people and, therefore, cannot be separated experientially and ideologically from the life of the society. The writer is seen as a teacher and philosopher. The sociology of Nigerian literature is underscored by its mediation of the historical experiences of Nigeria both before and after colonialism, which, according to Abiola Irele (2001: ix), "serves as a constant reference" for the Nigerian creative imagination. While discussing how this history defines the African imagination, Irele observes:

> It is impossible, in the particular circumstances of its development, to ignore the specific historical and sociological references of African imaginative expression in the European languages, for these references have determined the genesis and evolution of the literature" (2001: ix-x).

In the face of contemporary reality and because of the complexity of the experiences that this literature mediates, these historical and sociological references have undergone various transformations. The historical and cultural dynamics of

contemporary Nigeria demonstrate a complex combination of oppositional and subversive reactions to the challenges of modernity. The existential challenges of this situation are fraught with tensions at every level of both collective consciousness and individual apprehension (Poirier, 1994; Gyekye, 1997; Irele, 2001). Thus, as Irele (2001) further argues,

> It is hardly a simplification to observe that literature has come to be regarded less as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, enjoying an ideal status in an autonomous realm, than as essentially a mode of discourse that, for all its particular character, shares with other modes of discourse a common ground in social and cultural practice (xiv).

This process of transformation, both in the practice of creative writing and in the direction of literary discourse, has equally been demonstrated in the re-evaluation of what has been termed "minority discourses", which concern such issues as race, ethnicity and gender. Edward Said (1980) described this re-evaluation as a re-emergence of a transformed idea of comparative literature, which is not restricted merely to philology or the thematic study of texts, but that whose "new comparative style is metacritical, transnational, [and] intertextual" (viii). This form of discourse derives its suggestive force from what Irele has described as "its recourse to image and metaphor" and the "symbolic mode by which it seeks to organize experience" (2001:xvii) which entails what Gerard Graff has described as 'a propositional' aspect (Quoted in Irele, 2001: xvii). This propositional aspect situates the literature and discourse within the framework of life and its articulation in connection with other forms of social production of meaning in contemporary world.

Yinka Agbetuyi (2002) described the sociology of Nigerian poetry as its ability to respond to contemporary situations and experience. According to him, this is done in two basic ways:

> The first is the articulation of mythic history which often features the deployment of appropriate historical art form and tropes like the praise poem, the elegy, or incantatory poetry. Poets have also responded to contemporary history by delineating, in poetic tropes, the import of recent social events for Nigerians. These often take the form of ruminations where the poet, often with heightened sensibilities, redraws the contours of such events, foreground their impact on the daily grind of the commonality. (533)

The late Nigerian poet, Christopher Okigbo, described the two dimensional natures of poetic composition as its self-reflexivity and its universal connectedness. According to him, "any writer who attempts a type of inward exploration will in fact be exploring his society indirectly." (Quoted in Agbetuyi 2002: 533) This is acceptably so because the writer does not live in isolation, but interacts "with different groups of people at different times" (Agbetuyi, 2002: 533). This form of connectedness or universality has been described as the exploration of the collective historical memory which is transformed as counter-memory to engage experiences within contemporary social structure. According to Rigney, this is responsible for the current interest in memory, which is largely driven by a "desire to explore the various ways in which people remember the past and the many versions of the past that have fallen outside the purview of professional historian" (Senayon Olaoluwa, 2009: 177). Therefore, as Rigney argues further,

> The study of such memories has been based on a belief in the importance and possibility of 'recovering' memories which were once there and which have since been 'lost or 'hidden'. This recovery project is itself linked in complex ways to contemporary identity politics and to the desire of particular groups to profile their common identity by claiming distinct roots in a particular historical experience. (Senayon Olaoluwa, 2009: 177)

Gerald Echterhoff (2008), for instance, explains that the concept of memory is used to describe a variety of "processes, structures, and systems" which "allow events and experiences at time to affect people's experiences and behaviors at time" (264). Memory is central to self-reflexivity and all self-narratives. The historical continuity through memory is understood at an ideological level and is generated through self-reflection and cultural recollection. Nzegwu (2000) describes historical memory as the domain of self apprehension and self-definition. According to him, historical memory enables us to explore our experiences as raw material for the construction of identity and to situate our knowledge meaningfully within specific social and cultural contexts. As a form of reflection, memory becomes more prominent when there is some form of denial, alienation and displacement. In the process of reflection there is recollection, which in itself is a process of knowledge and self apprehension. Ordinarily, this occurs when a situation arises that raises questions and queries the authenticity of one's knowledge of history and cultural practices, which, according to Nzegwu (2000), "forces cultural tradition to be learnt in the context of purposive action." (Ayodeji Shittu, 2009: 336).

Memory, therefore, is the manifestation of a relationship or relationships and is conditioned by the ability to make connections where there are no obvious literal connections. According to Mahoso (2001:150), the African memory is characterised by an ethnic solidarity which has "profound implications for inter-cultural communication, dialogue, multilogue and mutual understanding in a globalization world". Svensson (1997) also explains the relationship between memory and identity formation by arguing that, identities are formed from the biographical constructions such as observable in life stories. According to him, "these narratives differ from pure fiction in that they retell certain memories" (93). As such, memory has been described as the fundamental medium of ethnography and a decisive instrument for the recognition and formation of identity since "it relates history to identity and vice versa" (George Marcus, 1992: 93). Thus how and what is remembered is very important. Jan Assmann (2008) explains this by establishing the connection between memory and identity thus:

> Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a "diachronic identity," built "of the stuff of time" (Luckmann). This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. (109)

Astrid Erll (2008: 2) described cultural memory as the "interplay of past and present in socio-cultural contexts". Thus, an individual memory is not completely personal as it is the result of interrelations of experiences within cultural contexts. According to anthropological and semiotic theories, culture is described as a three-dimensional framework, which comprises social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities) (Erll 2008: 4). From this, therefore, "cultural memory" can be described as comprising "social memory", "material or medial memory", and "mental or cognitive memory" (Erll, 2008: 4). Aleida Assmann (2008) describes cultural memory as containing a number of messages, which are "[…] addressed to posterity and intended for continuous repetition and re-use" (99). This is also described as "active memory", which includes, among other things, works of art, which are destined to be repeatedly reread, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented upon (99). These are canonised memory, which are processed and become a repository of meanings. This kind of memory is mediated, although it has already lost its original subject or addressee. It is de-contextualised and separated from the original situation and frames within which it

acquired its meaning. As a result of it is situated within new contexts where it acquires new meaning and interpretations.

Cultural memory is, therefore, collective and universal within a socio-cultural context. This is not just because it is shared by everyone within the community but because it serves a function in that community that is relevant to every member of the community (David Manier and William Hirst, 2008: 253). As such, cultural memory has been described by Marcel Jean-Christophe and Laurent Mucchielli (2008) as "an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations" (141). And active memory is the creative exploration of this collective history, culture, facts and artifacts. They are employed variously and differently by individuals within particular experiential contexts as needed for identity formulation. According to Jurgen Straub (2008: 222),

> An *active* memory reconstructs the past and history from the standpoint of the present and in light of certain future expectations. Every memory-based representation employs the available cultural means of the specific present time. This present time encompasses the social situation, against the backdrop of which one speaks with others and communicates with them (be it in an oral language medium, written form, or a non-discursive, representative sign or symbolic system). (*Author's emphasis*)

The sociology and cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel poetry is defined by the dynamics of memory and how it helps in the understanding and interpretation of the present as a basis of identity formation. This is also enhanced by its engagement with trans-spatiality and cross-cultural relations, which qualities define migratory experiences in general and contemporary experience in particular. This was underscored by Okome when he described Nigerian migrant poetry as that which "refigures the tensions of home and exile in a way which is both personal and communal," such that the poet's "personal universe is constantly invested with the mythic history and cultural matrix of home," (Cited in Obododimma Oha, 2009: 183). According to Okome, this *home* is not only historical; it is also mythical, cultural and political having its "special spiritual essence too" (Cited in Oha, 2009: 183). Home, therefore, becomes a cultural map on which the migrant writer's personal life history, desires, hopes, and frustrations are situated; a map "which guides his weary body in the geography of exile" (183). It is this quality of the poetry that underscores its self-reflexivity and cultural constitution. It situates the poet's experience within specific

historical moments and socio-cultural contexts. This, in Attah Agbali's (2008) opinion, demonstrates the fact that every literary work is defined in relation to particular historical moment and context and that the reality such writing addresses usually transcends the writer's own immediate space of experience. It also negotiates other experiential spaces, which underscores its universal connectedness. According to Agbali,

> Every literature, though often embedded within the realities of its localized context, also equally transcends such ambient, feeding upon different imaginations and modalities that flow recurrently from diverse global processes, as well as the unique intrinsic subjectivity of the writer. Literature is bound to specific localities through the kind of imageries and scenarios that shape the explanatory contours that map the literary landscaping and crafting of idea that give birth to literary productions (33).

Within the geo-cultural space of exile and migratory experience, these mythical, cultural resources undergo constant reconfiguration and transformation to generate new bodies of meanings and signification. Ato Quayson (1997a) described this as the affectivity of such cultural tropes and recourses, which defines their ethnographic import. He describes this kind of exploration as the ethnography of interpretation. According to Quayson, an ethnographic reading of a literary text, for instance, would reveal its historical and cultural constitution and take it beyond being treated as a mere "conservatory of inert images, tropes and cultural values". Instead, it would treat it as the "predicate of the dynamic movement of history itself in both its diachronic and synchronic dimensions" (1997a: 160).

Contemporary Nigerian literature, either at home or in the Diaspora, is defined by plurality of culture, consciousness and space. It betrays a sense of dislocation and dissonance, which result from social displacement and cultural ruptures. According to Richard K. Prieb, African writers make up arguably "the most transcultural and transnational group of individuals anywhere in the world" (Cited in Ojaide, 2008: 1). This quality makes them an intricate part of the modern worldwide migration and globalisation with all its attendant implications which include physical, socio-cultural, psychic, dislocation and other forms of dislocation, which are evident in their writings. These conditions have bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form of these writers' creative production. Nigerian migrant and travel writers belong to this group of writers, a fact that is established by the observation of the former ambassador

of the United States of America to Nigeria, Howard F. Jeter, in 2003. According to him, the population of Nigerians in the United States has increased considerably:

> Nigerians now represent one of the largest groups in the African Diaspora and one of its most well organized entities. While estimates vary, there are between 650,000 to 1 million Nigerians residing in the U.S. About 100,000 Nigerians live in the Houston, Texas vicinity alone. Nigerian Americans have organized themselves along professional, ethnic, and regional lines. A UNDP study compiled in the last decades notes that over 2,100 Nigerian doctors were practicing in the United States in the mid-1990s; not surprisingly, there is an Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas. Igbo and Yoruba associations also flourish in the United States, and Nigerian community organizations are popping up in every state with a large Nigerian population base – such as the Nigerian Association of South Florida (6-7).

This was also corroborated by Patrick Wilmot who observed that the economic and political mismanagement of Nigeria has resulted in an epidemic of brain drain which has resulted from the mass exodus of Nigerians to Europe and America. In his opinion, the implication of this for the wellbeing of the country is grave:

> […] to replace a Nigerian specialist in a European or American hospital could take up to 30 years. How long would this country take to replace all the university lecturers now teaching overseas, all the way from South Africa to Europe, the U.S.A, Jamaica and China? (*Intervention* IV, 2007: 111).

Many Nigerian writers and intellectuals and other economic refugees migrate to Europe and America because they are disenchanted with the political, social and economic conditions of the country (Susan Arndst, 2006; Eldred Jones, 2000). The scale and frequency of transnational migrations of Nigerian writers, especially since the 1990s, have been quite considerable and have generated critical discourses and debates as to their long-time implications both on the identity of migrants and on the kind of cultural products that result from the experience. One thing that seems fundamental to trans-cultural literature is its interrogative and syncretic nature. Such literature tends towards the subversive since migration and all forms of border crossing are, essentially, subversive. Obododimma Oha (2009) explains that trans-cultural encounters essentially necessitate interrogation of relationships and feature an invention or re-invention of identity. According to him, the trans-cultural is also transgressive as it ordinarily transcends and violates cultural boundaries and "creates a dialogism that challenges

cultural hegemony" (182). As he further observes, the act of returning to the African root which characterises the writings of those Africans that have migrated to Europe and America is an indication of the idea of "movement of transgression". This, according to him, does not only manifest in the physical crossing of cultural borders and the desire to recreate or re-invent the homeland and the past that was left behind in the process of emigration but also in the interrogation of the epistemological orientations and hegemony of Europe and America (182).

Nigerian migrant and travel literature is characterised by representations of this consciousness. These writings form a body of knowledge and frameworks for understanding Nigeria's and Nigerians' relational dynamics in their encounters with the rest of the world, particularly Europe and America. Post-colonial encounters between the post-colonies and Euro-America are constantly mediated and deconstructed by the "historical continuity" of the colonial experience and the memory generated by it. This forms a useful source of insight into the impact of globalisation and the attendant trans-cultural migrations on the meaning of Nigerianess and pan-Nigerianism. Through the writing of these experiences Nigerian migrants to Europe and America reveal the dynamics of the cultural relationship between Africa and Europe. This is important, especially because it provides a unique insight into the issue of identity which is one of the major problems of migrations.

Rudiger Kunow argues that post-colonial relations underline the engagement of space and the fact that spaces are always occupied and hence contested. Therefore, border-crossing and cross-cultural relationships imply contestation of both land and psyche spaces. He argues that from the post-colonial standpoint, there is no free or uninhabited space as it is usually always full and transgressed:

> Borders, limits, fault-lines of culture are in this perspective no longer merely the end point of a definable, circumscribed space, but in a sense its beginning, the point at which or from which the inscription of a revisionist, differential cultural location will have to start (Cited in Oha, 2009: 182).

Transnational discourse is thus postcolonial, partly because it is a fallout of colonialism and the eventual independence of former colonies after the Second World War and partly because it is also an interrogation of both the colonial and post-colonial conditions in the light of contemporary global relations. Susan Arndt and Marek Spitczok Von Brisinski (2006) acknowledge this condition by describing the various levels of relationship that colonialism created and reactions to them:

> Colonialism along with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, was the first global development that moved people from their homes to places all around the world on a mass scale. In fact, colonialism raised this kind of global movements – of borders, people, cultures, ideas, religions and ideologies – to a new level, thus serving to extend and maintain a Western hegemony in political, economic and cultural terms and simultaneously instigating manifold patterns of subversion (abrogation, appropriation, creolisation, hybridisation, and negation). The effects of these multidirectional movements can be distinctively felt globally and contributed in no small part to the 21st century of today. (9).

Miles (2004) described trans-nationalism as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement"(8). Therefore, she argues that transnational migration suggests an act of border crossing and at the same time the transformation of the spaces encountered during this border crossing. It implies that transnational migration involves the crossing of both physical and ideological borders. In other words, it engenders a transformation of social and cultural patterns as well as ideas and dispositions. In the process of interrogating the geo-cultural space they adopt they unavoidably recreate the space and their own identity.

This idea of transnational relation agrees with Marry Louise Pratt's understanding of the preoccupation of autoethnography, as a writing of personal and the collective experience; the self and the social. According to Pratt (1992; 1994), there is a connection between the concept of autoethnography and the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. She relates autoethnography to the "relations between colonized and colonizer, and to modes of resistance to dominant discourses offered by native account" (Cited Reed-Danahay 1997: 7). Therefore, she describes autoethnography as:

> […] a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them […] Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autoch-thonous or 'authentic' forms of self-representation […] Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding (Reed-Dnahay, 1997: 7-8).

The exploration of the representations of this transgressive relationship, both as a personal story and testimony and the narration of collective history of cultural encounters, is the particular focus of the study. The study, therefore, addresses the fact that self-narrations, and particularly the autobiography, involve the re/writing of the autobiographer's life history and the society or cultural space they inhabit. How do Nigerian migrant and travel poets respond to their encounter with the West as former colonial subjects and as exiles? How do they represent this? How do their representations of the metropolitan and dominant cultural space reveal their otherness and marginality? How do their exploration of the homeland, for instance in the form of exploration of oral traditions, cultural tropes and myth, describe their negotiation of modernity to invent or re-invent identity as necessitated and allowed by the condition of exile? These are the pertinent questions that the study addresses.

Tanure Ojaide (2008), a Nigerian migrant poet that resides in the United States of America, observes that the content and style of African migrants' literature is individual and peculiar to each writer. According to him, sub-Saharan African migrant writers react, each according to their peculiar experience which often results in general and sometime peculiar features. He, therefore, grouped some of these writers according to time and consciousness as follow:

> Generally, the Africans born in the 1940s and 1950s respond differently from those born after the 1960s and those born abroad. Those born in the 1940s and 1950s grew up in Africa and went to school there. In their writings, they tend to compare their native African environment with the new Western environment. These writers view the Africa they know with a sense of nostalgia and often maintain an African identity in a foreign land (2008: 1).

The result of these adaptations is the focus of many recent studies of literary critics and students of African literature.

The art of narrating the experience of displacement is naturally traumatic. This trauma is usually caused by a sense of dislocation and the pain involved in the recollection of such experience. As Kwame Dawes (2007) notes, "the alchemy of transforming terrible tragedies of human experience into art, into music, poetry, dance, sculpture, film can be an unforgiving vocation" (11). Then he asks the pertinent question:

> How do craft and content meet, how do passion and the ordered consideration of craft work hand in hand? How does one speak

> politics and yet contemplate such articulations as art? To answer such questions, we must assume that the artist is an artist regardless of where he or she finds him or herself (11).

He goes ahead to provide an answer:

> […] the poet turned to form, turned to the ordering of verse to manage the disorder of his vision of a fellow solder drowning in a sea of noxious gases. The craft was his savior, his calming moment. The craft allowed him to speak to determine a discourse of ideas, a discourse that would emerge as a polemic, but a deeply musical polemic […] the act of formalizing experience, the business of taking pain and making it into something manageable, something that comes under the control of the artist and then the listener, is the fundamental aesthetic shared by people who write out of suffering (12-13).

This effort to make sense of experiences that are otherwise disorderly and are driven by "the compulsion of self-preservation" is "cathartic". This is so, according to Kwame, (2007), "because one is busy imposing something like order on the chaos of existence, and in doing this, one is giving life to the moment, to the experience one is managing" (13). This aptly describes the poetry of Nigerian migrants and travel writers. The migrant poet attempts to make sense of the dissonance and the consequent schizophrenia that characterise their experience. Therefore, while describing the creative sensibility of Chris Abani, a Nigerian exile writer, Kwame inadvertently describes creative sensibility of most Nigerian migrant writers:

> In exile, there is distance that allows for memory that remains painful to be controlled. Always below the surface is the pain of the political situation in Nigeria, the memory of the deaths, the memory of his own fear, the residual nightmares of his life – they are all there, brimming beneath the surface like tears held in (18).

1.2 Globalisation, trans-nationalism and contemporary life history

The kind of remembering described above is done autobiographically and it characterises much of contemporary self-narratives. In the age of globalisation and transnational migrations, history and nationality are central and along with it are the resultant problem of displacement and the need for replacement; marginalisation and racism. Consequently, contemporary literatures are multicultural and transnational in aesthetics and preoccupations. Because of the challenges and relational dynamics of a globalised existence and the identity crises that result, the genre of self-narration has become predominant.

For instance, Birgitta Svensson (1997: 72) observes that the late modernity has been characterised by growth in the documentation of life stories either as an ethnographic research or as literary creativity. She argues that this is important because of the need for self identification and definition. According to her, "Identities are formed from the biographical constructions of which the life stories are a part. These narratives differ from pure fiction in that they retell certain memories" (1997: 93). Thus, autobiographical writing becomes a means by which people attempts to come to term with the realities and challenges of modern existence through a self-awareness and reflexive process which plays to a great extent on both personal and collective memories. Svensson, however, underscores the complexity of this form of writing:

> In modernity, however, it is difficult to grasp how different kinds of memories are structured. The boundaries between the private and the public in everyday life have become obscure. Memory is not a collective construction as it was in traditional society, when it was communicated and handed down in oral traditions and storytelling; now it is expressed in individual memories and autobiographies. Even the collective memory is passed on in modern society through the individual memory (93).

Autobiographical writings have become a postmodern means of ordering life, time and space and have "acquired a normative power in modern society" (Svensson, 1997: 99). However, the central debate around this form of writing is the degree of subjectivity or objectivity involved in the constructions of biographical writings. As Svensson notes, it is necessary to carefully consider what forms of constructions are possible "socially, historically, and politically" and how these constructions form part of a larger "metanarrative" (99). Therefore, she notes that modern existence does not only encourage writing of biography as a way of ordering life, it is also lived biographically:

> Modern existence is ordered as an autobiographical presentation. On the basis of different life perspectives, we shape the present against the background of our earlier history and with our sights set on the future. (99-100)

In the works of migrant and Diaspora writers, biographical writings are usually connected to image of multiple geographies – the homeland and the adopted geography of exile or Diaspora. In other words, it transcends the narration of self and includes the relation of the self to a past that is collective in its historicalness and to a present that is transnational and nebulous in its complexity. Such writings are generically characterised by ambiguity as they have dual ethnographic and autobiographical nature, which is

actually difficult to define in a world where ethnography has been defined as a text about a people and autobiography as a text about a person. However, Reed-Danahay distinguished the two genres by explaining that, traditionally, "the author-ethnographer is *not* one of those people described, while the author of an autobiography is the main subject of the life portrayed" (Reed-Danahay, 1997:127). Meanwhile, what is controversially common to these genres is the essential interplay of the self and culture in the writing of life history. Therefore, what in a sense constitutes ethnographic and autobiographical narrative is the shaping and restructuring of life experiences, the body of verified facts, known artifacts and records that connect in some sense with ours and others' experiences of life.

Autobiographies and autobiographical writings are not foreign to the Nigerian literary tradition. It has its origin in the oral tradition of the pre-colonial era when traditional poets narrated the experiences of important people and personages in the society while at the same time tell their own stories as emanating from the contexts of such narrations. This view is corroborated by Dasylva and Oriaku (2010):

> Despite the considerable shift in contextual paradigms that foreground the quill of the non-literate era and the cursor of the twenty-first century, the Nigerian auto/biography as life-portrait has stuck to and remained faithful to its traditional role of projecting a major personage, as well as archiving and documenting key social and historical events (303).

However, over the years and in the light of colonial and post-colonial realities, autobiography has become more engaging and densely ideological. Despite the fact that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been particularly characterised by autobiographical writings, emphasis has been on the traditional narrative mode of prose (non-fiction). This is perhaps because of the expressiveness of the genre and or the assumed strangeness of autobiography in the other genres such as poetry. But as Dasylva and Oriaku note, "studies in auto/biographical works go beyond the prose (non-fictional and fiction) literary sub-genre" and include other generic forms such as poetry and drama (303). This study, among other things, discusses the existence of poetic autobiography and the social and cultural engagement of this sub-genre of literature. As Dasylva and Oriaku further underscore:

> The fact that scholars in recent times, at different scholarly fora, have been preoccupied with locating and determining the true status of auto/biographical works as alternative history complements in view of apparent limitations, and the implications such a disposition has for the future of African history underscores

> the significance of the present topicality to African studies in particular, and scholarship in general (303).

As a way of determining the socio-cultural engagements of the autobiography, this study explores the relationship between the traditional interests of autobiography as the portrait of the life of the writer and its inherent cultural and historical values. In this way its uniqueness as a blend of self and culture in the context of social history is established. In other words, it examines the ethnographic interests of the autobiography. The form of self-narration that takes these elements into consideration has been described by postmodern and postcolonial anthropologist as Autoethnography. Autoethnography has been described as a form of evocative and self-reflexive writing that narrates the experience of the author in relation to certain historical and cultural imperatives and contexts.

While this concept adequately addresses the self-reflexivity and evocation of ethnographic writing as cultural writing by the ethnographer through an eye witness perspective, it fails to address the personal life/experience aspect of the social history. In other words, it only addresses the "auto" aspect of the ethnography (which implies the fact that it was written by the author, 'by oneself') without reference to the "bio" quality of the autobiographical writing (which suggests that the story is the life history of the author). In order to account for the "bio" aspect of the writing of the "ethno" (the culture), a new concept, "ethno-autobiography", is conceived. While taking into consideration the ethnography of the autobiography, ethno-autobiography equally stresses the primacy of the personal life experience. It suggests the autobiographer's situation is located "within a story of the social context in which it occurs" (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9). Ethno-autobiography is, therefore, different from the more conventional approach in which the autobiographer divorces the life trajectory from any social constraints. This is closely associated with the concept of a "social poetics" as used by Michael Herzfeld (1985 and 1996) to reflect the duality of much recent work on personal narration and life stories as having both self-reference and cultural-reference.

In his discussion of autoethnography, Philippe Lejeune (1989) questions the authenticity of the non-native or outsider ethnographer and, therefore, uses the concepts of "autoethnology" and "ethnobiography" to describe the place of the native ethnographer and life story writer in the projection of the experiences and culture of their people. Lejeune uses these concepts as a means of avoiding what he sees as "the gap, or screen, of ethnography" (Cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997:7). For Lejeune,

"authenticity is masked by ethnology and these other forms represent more directly the voices of peasants and the working classes" (Cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997: 7).

Therefore, it is important to know the extent to which an outsider ethnographer can properly and objectively represent the social experiences of the under-studied. What is the status of the social and cultural history of a people told indirectly through the personal experiences of an ethnic insider? It is understood here that the social and cultural history of a people is the totality of the combined experiences of the individual members of that society. This is explored in this study by using Nigerian migrant autobiographical poetry and travel poetry as study cases. The migrant and travel writer is used as an example of ethnic insiders who not only narrate their own experiences but also how these experiences are shaped by various geo-cultural spaces. This culturally constituted autobiographical poetry has been conceptualised in this study as ethno-autobiographical poetry.

Migrant writing in this context refers to creative writings by emigrants to other geographical and cultural environments. The term "Nigerian migrant" is particularly used here to describes those Nigerians who migrated to Europe and America and other countries of the world for various reasons either with intention of coming back to their homeland or otherwise. On the other hand, travel writing is generally related to cross-cultural experiences and travels. In this case the 'lives' and 'people(s)' in question are framed in terms of a comparison, and sometimes a clash, of cultures. Historically, travel writing is associated with a range of colonial and imperial projects and their characteristically national, commercial and religious perspectives. But some sense of 'travelling' in space and time is entailed by just about any act of writing and representation, and ultimately this extends to the imaginative travels and mind-scapes of Science and Utopian or Dystopian Fiction.

For the purpose of this study, Nigerian postcolonial travelogues are used. Postcolonial travelogue is one of travel writing's most prolific and innovative offspring in the late twentieth-century. The socio-political changes brought about by the new century have dramatically altered the motivation and subject matter of a genre that has traditionally been involved in European expansionism and the construction of Europe's 'Other'. Once used as a vehicle for cultural prejudice, travel writings are used today as a powerful instrument of cultural critique. Contemporary travel writings have become a potent instrument of socio-cultural discourses.

1.3 Statement of the research problem

There is a view among critics that because ethno-autobiography is subjective it is not a reliable construction of social history. These critics assume that self-reflexive writings are predjudiced. Consequently, previous researches consider ethno-autobiographical poetry as essentially self-aggrandising, neglecting its form as a unique blend of both self and culture.

For instance, there is a notion among traditional anthropologists that only a professional ethnographer can construct a truly objective document of social and cultural history through participant observation and by avoiding personal involvement in the story they write. Because of this disposition and the belief that autobiographical writings are too personal many social scientists and historians treat autobiographies and other autobiographical writings with suspicion. They, however, feel comfortable with biographies and oral histories and traditions as reliable sources of social histories for whatever reason.

However, critics such as Clifford Geertz (1983), Mark Neuman (1996), Leon Anderson (2006), and Reed-Danahay (1997), have questioned this position by arguing that ethnographies are actually the perspectives of the ethnographers on the cultures and societies they study. They conceive them as self-reflexive constructions of cultural history and argued that they can only be appropriately conceptualised as autoethnographies.

Therefore, this study explores the cultural constitution of selected Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry, in terms of racism, ethos, and space, with a view to establishing its features as a source of social history. All well crafted life histories are a blend of self and culture; they are products of social and cultural experiences and as such provide unique insights into social history.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to demonstrate that Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographcal poetry are culturally constituted and not a merely self-aggrandising writing. This poetry depicts interplay of racism, ethos, and space in the authors' self construction, thereby demonstrating their quality as a unique blend of self and culture. These autobiographical poetry are conceptualised as ethno-autobiographies

in order to stress their ethnographic quality. Because Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry are trans-spatial in preoccupation, they address problems of cross-cultural relations: racism, cultural displacement, and hybridity. Also, as forms of social criticism, they interrogate the geo-cultural spaces of the homeland and Euro-America and their impact on the authors' identity construction.

Resulting from this main objective, the study infers as follows:

1. That every well-written autobiography is inherently ethnographic and thus qualifies to be described as an ethno-autobiography;
2. That every art of writing is a product of culture and as such provides unique perspective on and insight into social history;
3. That no writing of any kind is absolutely objective but that all human records or writing of any sort bears the imprint of the recorder or writer; they are all self-reflexive.
4. That every art and act of self construction and writing is also a writing and construction of society and culture.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study provides a completely new perspective on the reading of Nigerian autobiographical writings. Through the conception of the term ethno-autobiography to describe the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel autobiographical poetry, the study has theorised the inherent quality of autobiography in general as a cultural product. It thus debunks the misconception that autobiographies are essentially self-aggrandising or even a lie as some critics hold by demonstrating its features as a critique of self and society and a deconstruction of master narratives.

Secondly, this study addresses the critical neglect of the sub-genre of autobiographical poetry in Nigerian literature. Scholars such as Kay Warren (1997); Birgitta Svensson (1997); Henk Driessen (1997); Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997); Alexandra Jaffe (1997); and Caroline Brettell (1997), among others, have addressed the fact that life histories and the need to narrate our own life experiences are a quality of the modern world and existence. Femi Oyebode (2009); C. Oiler (1983); Furman (2006) and Shelly Tracy (2008) have also explored the autobiographical poetry as a very important means of documenting social histories and personal psyche. Oyebode, especially explored how poetry can help doctors, and psychiatrists in particular, to understand their patients better. These scholars attempted to define and explain

creativity and creative process as an activity that occurs in a range of spaces and contexts, from the individual to the cultural and political.

Despite these instances, it is noted that poetic autobiography is still not common as emphasis has always been on prose literature (Toyin Falola, 2008a; Dasylva and Oriaku, 2010). In Nigerian literary criticism, study of the autobiography has been primarily focused on prose literature and biographies. Apart from Obi Nwakanma's biographical reading of Christopher Okigbo's poetry in *Christopher Okigbo: Thirsting For Sunlight (1930-67)* (2010), there is hardly any serious study of Nigerian biographical or autobiographical poetry. This current study, therefore, addresses these gaps by exploring the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel poetry in English. This is expected to encourage more interest in the study of the sub-genre of autobiographical poetry.

Therefore, this study is expected to generate new discourses on the genre of autobiography and particularly Nigerian autobiography. It is expected to draw attention to the complex problems of Africa and African migrations and stimulate curiosity about how literary production might be considered an aspect of the narration of the location of the self in the complex systems of identification, negotiation, and accommodation in a globalised word.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study explores the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel autobiographical poetry in English. The poets studied were purposively selected and, according to Niyi Osundare's (1997) classification, they belong to the second, third and fourth generations of Nigerian writers. Most of these writers were born in the 1940s and 1950s and in the 1960s respectively. Some of them migrated to Europe and America in the late 1980s and in the 1990s for various reasons: as lecturers, students, political asylum seekers, social and economic refugees in search of safety and/or greener pastures. Apart from Odia Ofeimun and Remi Raji whose selected works are poetic travelogues, all the selected poets were migrants to and reside in either Europe or America. These writers include Tanure Ojaide, who belongs to the second generation, Femi Oyebode, Olu Oguibe, and Uche Nduka, all belonging to the third generation (Osundare, 1997: 40).

While some of these writers come home to Nigeria at intervals, others have not visited home for a long time, though they have developed various means of keeping abreast of the happenings at home. These groups of writers are selected primarily

because of their different degrees of cultural attachment to the country which defines their cultural and historical memory. These factors enable the examination of the impacts of distance and time on the dispositions of the migrants to their cultural heritages and homeland. They also enable the exploration of the dynamics of cultural adaptation and assimilation within a multicultural setting. Apart from *London Letter and Other Poems* by Odia Ofeimun and *Shuttlesongs: America* by Remi Raji, all the selected texts are migrants' autobiographies. Odia Ofeimum and Remi Raji reside in the country and only travelled out briefly during which period their collection of poems under study were written or conceived. Therefore, they are poetic travelogues. Since travelogues are autobiographical, they are appropriately situated within the scope of the study.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The study consists of six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which provides a general background to the study. The second chapter is the review of relevant literatures on Autobiography, Ethnography, Autoethnography and Ethno-autobiography. It also relates the genre of Ethno-autobiography to migratory experience. The third chapter discusses the research method and the theoretical framework that were employed in the study. Chapter four examines the deployment of oral resources as a means of identity negotiation and reinvention within the geography of exile and migratory experience. It examines the transformations that these historical and cultural geographies bring to the semantics and significations of these oral resources and how they were adapted by the poets to their peculiar experiences. Using the poetry of Femi Oyebode and Remi Raji for illustrations, the chapter demonstrates that the peculiarities of various social and cultural geo-spaces and history define and redefine writers' creative explorations of oral resources. It also demonstrates the transgressive and interrogative nature of such explorations within a trans-cultural context.

The fifth chapter explores the representations of the displaced self as exile and migrant and the implication for their identity construction. It examines the attempts made by the exile and migrant writer to re-invent and re-place the self within the social, political and cultural spaces of the homeland through the excavation of memory of the past. It also examines how these writers interrogate the past as a way of making sense of their status as post-colonial subjects and the relationship of this status with the idea of a globalised existence and global citizenship. For these purpose, migrant autobiographical

poetry of Tanure Ojaide, and Olu Oguibe, Uche Nduka and Odia Ofeimu's poetic travelogue are examined. This act of reconnecting with the geo-cultural space of the homeland through memory and interrogation of the Other's social and cultural geographies and history are seen as a means of addressing the identity problems associated with the dynamics of trans-cultural encounters and relations in the age of globalisation. The sixth chapter is an attempt at theorising the African and Black autobiography by distilling poetic qualities that define its ethnography. The chapter questions the notion that the genre of autobiography is European in origin and argues that it is universal. It argues that every society, ancient or modern, has its own ways of documenting life histories within its cultural context.

END NOTES

1. This record was presented more than six years ago. A lot has happened since and many more Nigerians have emigrated to Europe, Canada, China, especially to the United States of America and Australia following their visa lottery programme and special immigration laws respectively.

2. Patrik Wilmot, a black Caribbean, worked as lecturer in Northern Nigeria for many years and even married a Nigerian woman. Despite this, he was refused citizenship by the Nigerian government. He is now a British citizen.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 0 Introduction

There are ongoing debates among theorists of autobiography on questions of genre, authorship, audience, ethics, kinds of cultural stories, and the boundary between fiction and nonfiction. These debates, which have already redefined how each of these questions is viewed, are increasingly informed by the work of narrative theorists who raise similar issues about first-person narrative, auto/fiction, and auto/diegetic narration. Within this frame of discourse, life narrative is no longer seen as the monologic retrospective narrative that documents a lived past. Instead, it is being reconceived in relation to different subjects, sites, kinds, and modes of representing experience and constructing identity. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Waston (2005) observe,

> as theorists now situate auto/biography troublingly, as at once fictive, self-referential, and experienced by readers as nonfictional, referential, or "real-world," our sense of how life narratives engage the "real" may persuade narrative theorists to attend more extensively to the contexts of reading and the locations and positions of narratives (368).

The main issues in the theorisation of autobiography have been identified as those that concern the autobiographical pact, the dichotomy between the insider and the outsider view, the ethics of "I" witnessing account, and the peculiar use of the autobiographical writing within social contexts. While discussing the act of self-narration and the "tension between creativity and restraint associated with that act in various political contexts", Reed-Danahay (1997) observes that there are two major developments in cultural studies, which are: "debates about representation (by whom and about whom), and the increasing trend toward self-reflexivity in all realms of writing" (1). Kenneth Mostern (2004: 28) also notes that theorising the autobiography involves articulating two necessary positions, what he describes as two "distributive axes": an axis of referentiality, and an axis of subjectivity. According to Mostern, "referentiality" concerns the question of whether autobiography is to be understood as a representation or otherwise of the real world outside the text. On the other hand, he describes "subjectivity" as "the discussion of the position of the speaking subject" (28). That is, the "I" witness (or in a few cases without "I") point of view that narrates the autobiographical text. This includes, according to Mostern, "its social positioning and

construction, its number, its autonomy, its relationship to other subject–position" (28). He argues that these axes are very central to the understanding of the autobiography because there is no way autobiography can be defined without some explicit or implicit posturing along each of these axes. According to Mostern, "each axis provides a continuum rather than a set of discreet positions; the precise definition of any given writer does not necessarily fall neatly into one side of an issue" (2004: 28-29). For instance, while addressing the difficulty of defining autobiography, Sidonie Smith and Julia Waston (2005) explained that the term 'auto/biography' is "an 'umbrella' term for widely diverse kinds of life narrative" (357). According to them, autobiography includes many other narrative practices that engage "historically situated practices of self-representation":

> The field of autobiography studies, as it has developed across multiple theoretical and methodological approaches, has consistently troubled single definitions as inadequate to account for its myriad genres and the rich complexities of acts of self-narrating and self-representation. The autobiographical exceeds attempts to pigeonhole it, in terms of generic aesthetics, forms, usages, and receptions. Both the importance and the excesses of this theorizing call those of us in the field to return repeatedly to how the autobiographical exceeds our efforts to fix its aesthetic, ethical, political, and sociocultural meanings across histories and geographies. (357)

Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003) addresses the fiction and nonfiction binary and the question of the relationship between the author and audience by describing the autobiography as any text that presents life experience in a manner different from a fiction. Gudmundsdóttir argued that any writing that will qualify as autobiography must indicate either through its title or subtitle and through its preoccupation and presentation to be true experience. This is suppose to give it its non-fictional status and is in most cases indicated by the narrative point of view, which is usually the first person narrative point of view; the "I" or eye-witness perspective. According to Gudmundsdóttir, "this entails that the texts have the same author, narrator, and subject" (2). However, he included among these texts in which the author writes "on the life of his or her parent(s), as these types of text constitute a large part of current life writing" (2). This branding of the autobiography and the expectation of the reader is what Philippe Lejeune has described as the "auto/biographical pact". According to Lejeune (1989), this concept describes the double contract of life writing, which demands that an author give guarantee that the name on the books' cover corresponds to the "life" narrated within.

This, he argues, is what defines an autobiography for the person who is reading the text; a "contract of identity […] sealed by the proper name" (19). From Lejeune's perspective, two things distinguish the autobiography and other forms of life narratives from fictions and particularly the novel. These are the "vital statistics" of the author such as date and place of birth and the author's education, which must correspond with those of the narrator. There must be also a sort of contract or "pact" between the author and the publisher that the identity of the author is true (21).

The problem with Lejeune's position above is that, while the provision of bio-data such as date and place of birth may be easily applicable to what can be referred to as traditional autobiographical writings, especially in the prose narrative form, it does not take into consideration literary autobiographies such as autobiographical poetry which in most cases does not include names and other bio-data in the text. Max Saunders (2008) addresses this issue when he argues that such position raises the question of the legitimacy of a literary contract, and creates problem of how to read other writings that do not fit the contractual model. She describes these other writings as "non-contractual autobiography". According to Saunders, this kind can be "found in third-person autobiography (such as *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918), pseudonymous publication (such as *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, by William Hale White, 1881), and the vast genre of the autobiographical novel" (322).

Smith and Waston (2005) reacts to the problem of the validity of the authorial voice by identifying four questions that have been raised concerning the autobiography since "the memoir boom in the 1990s" (357). These questions also define the features of theoretical discourse of contemporary life writings in general and particularly serve as pivotal for theorists who are engaged in the negotiation of the "complex practices of the auto/biographical writing" (357). These are:

(a) autobiographical hoaxes and the status of the autobiographical pact;

(b) the politics of reading postcolonial writers who efface distinctions between the autobiographical and the fictive and the status of marking the withholding of autobiography as an "out-law" rhetorical move;

(c) the ethics of narrative witnessing to suffering, loss, and survival and the status of witness narratives for narrators and readers;

(d) the materiality of the narrator's body and the status of materialized self-representation in the autobiographical (357-358).

For instance, on the politics of reading postcolonial writers in relation to the "truth" status of the autobiography, Gayatri Spivak (1998: 10) observed that some contemporary postcolonial writings violate the fiction/nonfiction dichotomy because of the peculiarity of their experience. According to Spivak, these postcolonial writers do this by "both calling on readers to read their narratives against auto/biography and asserting authoritative witness to subjective truth through a – usually first-person – narrator". Caren Kaplan (1992) describes this kind of writing as "out-law" life narratives that violate the norms of autobiography as a genre and present versions of subjective experience, which are excluded from its master narratives and official histories of the West. According to her, these writers play on the different readers' expectations of fictional and nonfictional texts in ways that admit of no easy resolution. Gayatri Spivak explained this effacing of the fiction/nonfiction distinction by arguing that postcolonial writers at times conceive their narratives as "withheld autobiography" (Spivak 1998: 10). She argues that these fictionalised narratives inscribe the voices of subjects who do not have access to writing by "converting an autobiographical discourse of subjectivity into testimony" (Smith and Waston, 2005: 362). Spivak describes this as "the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other" (7). Therefore, Smith and Watson (2005) argue:

> By theorizing this reworking of autobiography as a narrative mediating multiple accounts of silencing that cannot be voiced directly, Spivak suggests that such narratives rework the terms of life narrative rather than willfully impersonating another's experience (362).

Francoise Lionnet pointed out in this regard that to read such postcolonial narratives for their "autobiographicality" ordinarily shifts the reader's focus to "orality and the me´tissage or braiding of incommensurate discourses and languages as multiple dissonant voicings" (Smith and Watson 2005: 362). Postcolonial narratives may also intervene in modes of the autobiographical that constitute legacies of what Aijaz Ahmad terms "capitalist modernity" (1995: 7). The practice of framing an autobiographical narrative as a novel to distance it from the "law" of autobiography occurs in many other contemporary postcolonial life narratives, such as Nawal-El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Ken Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Maryse Conde´'s *He´re´- makhonon: A Novel*, Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Norma Cantu´'s *Canı´cula: Snapshots of a Girlhood in La Frontera*. These writers employ the strategies and complex relationship of "narrated and narrating 'I's" in order

to situate the individual subject within a collective identity that is overwritten by the process and legacies of colonisation. According to Smith and Watson, by incorporating and resisting the autobiographical "such narratives attest to the damage of that past" (363):

> When these writers trouble generic borders to subvert a fiction/nonfiction distinction, they call attention to the historical focus of canonical autobiography as a master narrative for political legitimation by invoking other discursive regimes, such as occluded oral histories and testimonies of violence and violation. Marking the autobiography/fiction difference by withholding the marks of autobiography and placing a text to the other side of that difference is a way of interrogating the complicity of the autobiography canon and its critics with dominant modes of self-representation and truth-telling. By recasting the presentation of subjectivity through fictionalized testimony, such writers call the myth of individual self-production sharply into question. (363 -364)

The problematic of these issues of boundary between fiction and nonfiction, though impossible to fix absolutely, has created serious challenges for the politics and ethics of writing and reading a life. These concern the four issues in theorizing the autobiographical and other forms of self or life narrative already raised above, which include the question of the "real" narrator, the politics of reading for "withheld autobiography" in postcolonial novels, appeals to readers made by witness narratives, and the materiality of self narration in multimedia presentations (Smith and Watson, 2005: 368). These challenges possibly can be better understood in terms of theoretical perspectives of Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, and (Post) Structuralism (Postcolonialism) on the practice of life writings, each of which has produced new turns in the biography of autobiography.

According to Max Saunders (2008), the theoretical disposition of psychoanalysis to the practice of life writing, rather than denying the value of interpreting the individual life, actually transformed the nature of such interpretation in two ways: first, by presenting a "radically fragmented picture of the self" and, second, "because one of the components, the unconscious, cannot be represented directly" (326). Therefore, Saunders argues:

> Autobiographers no longer have access to their full subjectivity; biographers have a new reason to mistrust their subjects, who not only do not know the full stories of themselves, but may produce unconscious distortions in recounting what they do know, or think

> they know. Thus the psychoanalytically minded biographer, or even autobiographer, assumes the role of analyst, listening to their subject for signs of repression, displacement, or slippage, while also (if they are scrupulous) recognizing that life-writing can never be the same as a formal psychoanalytic interaction. (326)

Marxism, which, though predates these positions, and became most influential in literary and cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s, voices two related objections in particular to the question of the historical relevance of literature. First, it sees the *form* of autobiography as essentially conservative: an expression of liberal individualism and bourgeois ideology. Second, that its *function* is to preserve a false consciousness: that its presentation of a totalised, coherent, and significant individual life is an illusion in a world of alienated capitalism. These positions are held despite the fact that life-writings have provided invaluable data for social historians of actual social experience of class struggle. (Max Saunders, 2008: 327). Apart from this, it is a misconception to see the autobiography as a conservative writing except it refers to the old practice in which autobiography was written mainly by a few "important" and upper class people. This is the reason this kind of autobiography is described as the "master's narrative" or "grand narrative". Contemporary autobiography is highly visible and public; the genre is employed by the masses and the voiceless to deconstruct and interrogate the official history and grand narratives and to make their voice heard.

The "I"/eye-witnessing paradigm for life-writing is, for example, diametrically opposed to the major (post)structuralist challenges to literary biography, which was first crystallised in Roland Barthes's famous essay, "The Death of the Author" (1967). Barthes opposed the biographical tradition on the grounds that it had a reactionary influence upon interpretation. New Critics saw biography as a distraction from a text's meaning, though they still argued that meaning was determinate. For Barthes, the problem with life-writing is precisely that it tries to fix meaning, by joining it to the author. Instead, he celebrates a textual pleasure liberated from authorial control; a rush of plurality. Authors are usually represented as having an authority function which is analogous to other patriarchs such as God, prophets, or kings. Therefore, Barthes's proclamation of the death of the author is the textual equivalent of Nietzsche's enunciation of the death of God. His essay is seen to precipitate nervous assertions that reports of authors' deaths have been exaggerated. But, according to Saunders (2008), this is to miss Barthes's point, which was to sketch a utopian revolution of reading.

Saunders explained that Michel Foucault's essay, entitled "What Is an Author?" (1969), approaches the issue from another perspective:

> Where Barthes's author is a tyrant of meaning, Foucault is concerned with discourse: the discourse of authorship; "the author" as a means of organizing knowledge; making the system of writing intelligible according to a specific categorization. (2008:328)

One response to such poststructuralist challenges is, perhaps, for autobiography to become postmodern; more conscious of its own narrativity, functionality and, impossibility. As Saunders observes, this postmodern turn, coinciding with the increasingly "auto/biographic turn" in twentieth-century fiction, "has produced writing which nomadically crosses the borders between biography and fiction." (2008: 328-329) For example, autobiography is often distinguished from biography based on whether the narrator is the subject. Upholding this position and perceived dichotomy between autobiography and biography is to overlook the fact that there is the presence of the biographer in the biography they write, which makes the biography self-reflexive. Laura Marcus (1994) addresses the problem when she argues that such a clear division between biography and autobiography can be very restrictive:

> Very recently - and the impetus has come primarily from feminist critics - the inadequacy of this conceptual divide has been clearly revealed and far more exciting conjunctures occur, showing how autobiography and biography function together. Recounting one's own life almost inevitably entails writing the life of another or others; writing the life of another must surely entail the biographer's identifications with his or her subject, whether these are made explicit or not. (273-274)

Although a conscious transgression of borders and genres in life-writing can also be seen as a postmodern trait, Marjorie Garber (1996) has argued that the use of fiction in autobiography is not a postmodern phenomenon in itself. This is despite the fact that she also believes that the borderline between fiction and non-fiction has been a specific practice of postmodernism. According to her,

> For the biographer and the autobiographer, postmodernity means understanding that there is no secure external vantage point from which one can see clearly and objectively, can 'realize' the subject. As if biographers ever thought they were doing that. That biography - and, even more, autobiography - is a species of fiction-making is a truth so old that only a willed cultural amnesia can make it new (175).

The increasing interest in the writing of the past has had great implication for the genre of autobiography. This can perhaps explain the present popularity of autobiography, which has resulted in much experimentation with the genre. Autobiographers are devising creative and new ways of writing about the past. Notwithstanding this, there is acceptance of the fact that it is difficult to represent the past and that the past is always already mediated. That is, it is difficult to retrieve the past except through memory and retrospection, in which case it is impossible to restore the past wholesomely. But there is also an acknowledgement of this fact that we can never escape the past, and that we must continue to examine it and to work with its influences in our cultural practices. As Linda Hutcheon (1985) claims in her discussion of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*:

> To write self-reflectively of history as process in progress, instead of as a completed product, is to break down the finality of formal narrative closure. Such a self-conscious opening up of the borders of both history and narrative is a postmodernist restating of the traditional (and perhaps obligatory) mimetic connection between art and life (312)

2.1 The genre of autobiography

Traditionally, autobiography has been said to deal "primarily with self-display and revelation of personality" (Oriaku 1990: v), which does not "always religiously bear its supposed burden of fidelity to historical facts" (4). This position is buttressed by Graham Greene (1971) who argues that "an autobiography is only 'a sort of life" which though may contain less errors of fact than a biography, is a selective narrative. This essentially "subjective" nature of the autobiography is underscored by John Griffith (1971) in his essay on the "The Rhetoric of Franklin's Autobiography". According to him, the autobiography is "a work of the imagination" in which the writer created a fictional and literary version of life, an abstraction of real life (79). Jean Starobinski (1971) defines the autobiography as "a biography of a person written by himself" (Oriaku 1990: 7). Karl J. Weintraub (1975) describes the autobiography as an "inward life" and not the physical life:

> The essential subject matter of all autobiographic writing is concretely experienced reality and not the realm of brute external fact. External reality is embedded in experience, but it is viewed from within the modification of inward life forming our experience […]. Autobiography presupposes a writer's intent upon reflection on whom [sic] this inner world of experience is important (Cited in Oriaku, 1990: 8).

Autobiography has been described by some critics as outright lie because autobiographers are believed to write only the aspects of their lives that they feel should be seen or known publicly thereby voiding its historical quality. Oriaku (1990), explains this to imply that self-censorship is an inherent quality of autobiographical writings. In his words, "self-censorship, in a sense, promotes insincerity and could lead to fictionalization"(11). George Bernard Shaw, for example, describes autobiographies as lies; "deliberate lies". According to Bernard Shaw,

> No man is bad enough to tell the truth about himself during his lifetime, involving, as it must, the truth about his family and his friends and colleagues [...] in a document which he suppresses until there is nobody left alive to contradict him (Cited in Oriaku, 1990:11).

Michael Angrosino (1989:224) describes autobiography as essentially "a narrative account of a person's life that he or she has personally written or otherwise recorded" and that it is usually characterised by the use of the first person narrative point of view in which case the narrator is one of the characters in the text, using the "I" witness perspective which gives the narrative some degree of credibility and verisimilitude. Christine Brooke-Rose (1977: 129), however, described the autobiography as an act of self-awareness through "self-confrontation". This, according to her, can only be done by situating the subject within a social context "which thus represents a spatial and temporal continuum". Taking this into consideration, Irving Louis Horowitz (1977) argues that autobiography is a form of self and social criticism which emphasises the fact that the self that is narrated in an autobiography is the product of a particular cultural context and the interaction with others within that context. According to her,

> The task of the autobiography is to point out not only what is common to all, but to demonstrate that each one of the selves is different from anyone else. Hence the autobiographical enterprise in some sense demonstrates that we cannot fulfill ourselves unless we are members of a group in whom there is a community of attitudes. Parenthetically, we cannot simply be a member of a community without developing a sense of individualism. It is this dialectical lesson turned didactic that autobiography renders meaningful (174).

While this stresses the individualism that is believed to define the autobiography, it equally, and perhaps contradictorily, stresses the fact that the identity of the individual is defined only in the company of other members of the group to which

they must belong. This implies that the narration of the self is done within the "native milieu". Thus, as Oriaku explains, the autobiography "serves the purposes of 'self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, self-formation, self-presentation [and] self-justification'" (1990: 17). In other words, the primary aim of the creative autobiographers is "to assert an acute consciousness and trace the course of its development" (Oriaku, 1990: 18). In this way, the autobiography is seen as an "'egocentric' literature" that is meant to achieve the glorification of the self; "an arresting presentation of self" (Horowitz, 1977: 173) and an avenue for the writer to satisfy their need "for transcendence and ultimately for [social] immortality" (174).

2.2 On the origin of autobiography

There are many Eurocentric perspectives and criticisms of African history, literature and creative enterprises. These include such opinion that Africa did not have drama or history before colonialism and that slavery and colonialism were providential tools used to civilise Africa and place it within the map of world history. The hypocrisy of this view of African history and literature is underlined by Amadou-Mahtar M ' Bow (1981). Amadou-Mahtar observed that there are double standards in the manner African history and culture and the history and culture of Europe and America are interpreted. For instance, he notes that while the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were rightly regarded as essential sources for the history of ancient Greece, African oral tradition, "the collective memory of people which holds the thread of many events marking their lives", was rejected as unimportant source for the history of ancient Africa (xvii).

In a similar manner, there are those who believe that the genre of autobiography is not indigenous to Africa. This Eurocentric school of thought refused to see Africans as the creators of original cultures but are imitators of other cultures and civilisations, especially those of Euro-America. According to Amadou-Mahtar, the problem with these colonial and Eurocentric historians and critics is their desire to dominate the world and define every part of it in their own image. He notes that their ignorance of history and cultures of Africans, "which flowered and survived over the centuries in patterns of their own making", has made it difficult for them to grasp their values and may remain so "unless they forgo their prejudices and rethink their approach" (xvii). They tried to create the impression that African creative art is validated only by European literary and cultural paradigms. This is, however, not true. The fact that African ancient histories, life histories and cultures were not written does not make them inferior to the Western

writing tradition. Every culture and society at different stages of its civilisation and development has ways of articulating its realities and experiences and documenting them.

There are, broadly speaking, two schools of thoughts on the origin of the autobiography in Africa. There is the school of thought that argues autobiography is the legacy of British colonialism. The other school of thought disagrees with the first view by arguing that the autobiography, as a sub-genre of creative art, pre-dated the colonial era as seen in various traditional performances and African oral narratives (See Karin Barber, 1991 and Adetayo Alabi, 2005).

Oriaku (1990), in his study of the genre of autobiography in Nigeria, argues that the autobiography (perhaps, in its traditional European sense) is not Nigerian. He argues that the genre does not have "equivalence in the oral tradition" (371). In other words, it is not "an indigenous Nigerian genre" (371). According to Oriaku,

> The closest related form to it is the panegyric or oral praise poem which is more of an equivalent to a subject-commissioned biography in Western literature, not auto/biography. One major reason for this is that Nigerian societies and cultures, like those of most of Africa, are predominantly egalitarian; they stress the primacy of the community and discourage individualism. (371).

It is clear from this submission that Oriaku believes that because of its supposed self-aggrandising essence autobiography must be a legacy of Western colonisation of Africa and thus was borrowed from European literary tradition. Only the European individualistic culture can produce an individualistic writing like autobiography. According to this argument, the incursion of colonialism and European cultures and values fundamentally re-defined the Nigerian life and cultures thereby inculcating in it individualistic tendencies. These borrowed tendencies, therefore, encouraged the emergence and development of the autobiography and other forms of self-narratives like the memoir, and diary. Nigeria, like many other African societies, is described as traditionally communal as opposed to the individualism that is characteristic of Euro-American culture and society. This difference is said to define the non-indigenous quality of the autobiography in Africa. As Oriaku further observes:

> With the British colonization of Nigeria, however, the situation changed. Western cultural values and practices gradually came to gain ascendancy over Nigerian culture(s) and, following this, individualism increasingly came into vogue. More and more Nigerians came into prominence as a result of the colonial encounter either as a result of their acquisition of British culture or

> their opposition to it or both. Thus, an elite class of politician and nationalists, jurists, artists, civil servants and solders has emerged and these have written accounts of their lives (1990:371-72).

While this is true of the consequences of colonialism, which has reproduced in Africa the culture of individualism and class that is characteristic of Europe and America, it is not true that this social disposition is essentially colonial or post-colonial. There has always been class stratification and individualism of some sort in Africa although it was not a cultural or societal norm. African pre-colonial history is replete with evidences of individualism and hero worship. Attributing the emergence of the genre of autobiography in Africa to colonialism could have been informed by the fact that the duo historical experiences of slave trade and territorial colonialism have thrown up several autobiographies. First, the slave trade produced the autobiography of Africans like Olaudah Equiano and others, while Western education, which has radically transformed our literary culture from the oral to the written form, and the struggle against colonialism, have produced such historical figures as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Mbonu Ojike and Anthony Enahoro (all Nigerians) who have written their personal histories (Oriaku, 1990:372). These autobiographies have been described as nationalist autobiography. As Oriaku explains, the post-colonial struggle

> has been the subject of not only the war memoirs but also some of the autobiographical novels and poetry. The heritage of colonialism does not lie only in the subjects and themes but also in the new world view, and, especially, a new sense of self, of personal achievement and the relation of self to society. (1990: 372).

While this view is true, it, however, does not rule out the existence of autobiography and other forms of life histories in the pre-colonial oral cultures of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The question that should be asked, however, is how did Africans express and articulate their "sense of self, personal achievement and the relation of self to society" before the advent of colonialism?

The argument that the genre of autobiography pre-dated colonialism in Africa is interestingly corroborated by Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) and Adetayo Alabi (2007). While describing the origin of the autobiography in Nigeria, Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) explain that every society has its own peculiar ways and means by which it chronicles events and experience both of individuals and that of the community. According to Dasylva and Oriaku (2010),

> Despite the considerable shift in contextual paradigms that foreground the quill of the non-literate era and the cursor of the twenty-first century, the Nigerian auto/ biography as life-portrait has stuck to and remained faithful to its traditional role of projecting a major personage, as well as archiving and documenting key social and historical events. [...] this sub-generic form of literature pre-dates the colonial era, and that most, if not all, forms of Nigerian literature, oral and written, are either steeped in auto/biography or characterized by it (303).

The argument is that the existence of written autobiography, which can be traced to literacy inherited from the West through colonialism, does not invalidate the existence of the tradition of self-narration in pre-literate African culture which pre-dated colonialism. Therefore, Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) identify two types of autobiography, which are traceable to two different origins. (1) There is the oral or primary autobiography and (2) there is the written or secondary autobiography. While the written or secondary autobiography concerns the post-colonial mode of narrating the self, which owes its origin to the Western culture of writing, the former concerns the oral mode of self expression. As Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) observe:

> That oral or primary auto/biography has always existed and has been, to a large extent, an integral of the oral literary corpus, is evident in most oral performances in which the oral performer, like the heroic (panegyric) poet, or the epic narrator-poet, consciously inscribes self into the oral text through a self-declarative prologue of personal celebration of identity, physiognomic features, family genealogy, and achievements considered to be unique (305).

They explain further:

> Usually, the characteristic self-inscription by the oral performer serves as a way of affirming his/her expertise in the art and a way of introducing the subject and the theme before embarking on the epic journey the purpose of which is celebration of uniqueness and greatness of the subject (305).

Adetayo Alabi (2007) supports this view and explains that there are various African oral traditions that are cast as autobiography. Although not written, Alabi argues that these oral performances are oral texts that document the experience of the individual performer, notwithstanding the fact that their narrations are situated within the ambit of the collective history and experience of their societies. As he notes,

> There are several oral autobiographical traditions, including praise poetry, epic, the hunters' chant, testimonies, witches' and wizards'

> confessions, as well as the bridal chant, in different parts of Africa. Some traditional professions even have autobiographical dimensions built into them. Hunting is one of those specialized professions with its own discourses and counter-discourses typically developed in the autobiographical hunters' chants. Among the Yorubas, it is called ijala. These hunters' chants are oral texts about the self. They belong to a genre exclusive to hunters, and are performed on various occasions, including hunters' festivals, coronation ceremonies, weddings, and other special gatherings (13).

Adetayo (2007), therefore, questions the idea that the genre of autobiography is not indigenous to Africa. He argues that the hunter's chant, which is known as *Ijala* in his Yoruba culture, demonstrates the autobiographical qualities of African oral traditions as a genre that pre-dated British colonialism. This, according to him, challenges Euro-American claim to the origination of the genre of autobiography and favours the uniqueness of self narratives within different cultural contexts. Therefore, Alabi (2007) stresses the need to closely investigate the autobiographical aspects of oral narratives in order to establish the traditional form of the genre:

> It is crucial to examine the autobiographical part of the hunters' chants because the chants question loudly the traditional definition of autobiography as stories of the self written by individuals. The chants also dispute the Eurocentric claim that autobiographies were not produced in Africa prior to colonization. In addition, the chants can be significant in reconstructing the history of precolonial Africa, a period when the hunters had more important military and community duties than they have presently (2007: 13).

The criticism of the claim by the Western world to sole origination of the genre of autobiography is not restricted to Africa. A similar view is expressed by Reynolds F. Dwight (2001). Reynolds notes that the idea of European origin of the autobiography is recent and questionable. He argued that European scholars from the late eighteenth through the first half of the twentieth century, including Goethe, Herder, and Dilthey, understood the fact that the genre of autobiography and other autobiographical writings, like every other artistic practice, is a universal genre. According to Reynolds, these scholars conceived of autobiographical writings "as a broad category of literary production that encompassed writings from both earlier historical periods and other cultures" (1). However, Reynolds notes that in the mid-twentieth century this view was suddenly reversed giving sole origination to the Western world. According to him,

> Autobiography was dramatically reconstructed in western literary criticism as a cultural product unique to modern western civilization. This new formulation appeared abruptly, fuelled perhaps by the impending collapse of the colonial encounter and perhaps also by the "threat" of cultural relativism. In the simplest of terms, immediately after World War II, western literary critics suddenly ceased to write of autobiography as a literary category parallel to "novel" or "biography," both of which easily admit of cross-cultural and historical comparisons, and began instead to treat it as the exclusive creation of the modern West (2001: 1).

A very clear instance of the assertions of this new stance was made by Georges Gusdorf in a 1956 article, which has been dubbed the very foundation of modern autobiography studies. In the words of Georges Gusdorf,

> It would seem that autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men of other cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own (Cited in Reynolds, 2001:2).

These assertions by Gusdorf have been reiterated many times in subsequent works by other scholars such as Roy Pascal. In fact, Pascal's expression of this position is a more pronounced form of essentialism:

> It is beyond my scope to suggest why autobiography does not come into being outside Europe, and the existence of such a work as Babur's memoirs of the sixteenth century, which would occupy a significant place in the history of autobiography had it belonged to Europe, makes one hesitate to generalise. But there remains no doubt that autobiography is essentially European. Where in modern times members of Eastern civilisations have written autobiographies, like Gandhi for instance, they have taken over a European tradition (Cited in Reynolds, 2001:3).

It is in this vein that the French critic, Georges May, conceived of autobiography as not just Western and modern European in origin but as particularly Christian. According to May, the autobiography emerged uniquely within the cultural influence of Christianity (Cited in Reynolds, 2001: 4). These assumptions, which have been seen in the work of Gusdorf, Pascal, and May, also recur in most western writings on the topic of autobiography. It is even expressed in those discrete aspects of the subject, such as childhood memoirs. As Reynolds quoted,

> The Childhood [autobiography] is a genre which presupposes a sophisticated culture. *It is inconceivable among primitives; even*

> *in the contemporary Third World, it emerges only in imitation of culturally more advanced models.* It demands a sense of form, and the intellectual ability to adapt the ill-balanced and misshapen material of experience to the harmony of literary expression without overmuch distortion of the original truth. It requires a grasp of the epic dimension, and the severe discipline of a controlled rhythm. […] .It demands self-knowledge. (Emphasis added) (Reynolds, 2001:5)

2.3 Autobiography and individualism

While Gusdorf, for instance, values autobiography (and the individual) as the product of a progressive history, he, however, seemed not realise or recognise the fact that this textual individualism is local and ideological. Unambiguous about the "us" who are his audience, Gusdorf claims:

> The concern, which seems so natural to us, to turn back on one's own past, to recollect one's life in order to narrate it, *is not at all universal*. It asserts itself only in recent centuries and only on a small part of the map of the world. The man who takes delight in thus drawing his own image believes himself worthy of a special interest. Each one of us tends to think of himself as the center of a living space: I count, my existence is significant to the world, and my death will leave the world incomplete. (1980: 40 and 41)

It is a general assumption that autobiography is always referenced with an "I". This assumption is upheld even when there have been efforts to show the "constructedness" of the "I," or its particular relationships to determinate "not-I's." However, as Mostern (2004) has observed, neither "auto" nor "bio" nor "graph" actually refers to the category of the individual:

> There is no semantic reason to presume that auto reference could not be to a group of people who form a collective subjectivity ("we"), and indeed collective autobiographies, like the New York 21's *Look For Me in the Whirlwind*, have been written." (32)

Originally, the word "autobiography" is said to have emerged in the nineteenth century with the public depiction of the individuated, private self by Romanticism and this ideology continues to influence how it is defined. Thus the basic form of the text is the *bildungsroman*, in which the author explains the peculiar circumstances that explain how "he (gender intended) became himself and not any other self" (Mostern 2004: 32). Of course the adequacy of the "I" accounting for itself may come under question and

individualism may be shown to deconstruct itself. The attribution of individualism to autobiography may be made by someone whose intention is to critique that individualism. Thus as Mostern further argues,

> The defining characteristic of critical individualist accounts of autobiography is their accounting for the failure of individualism via the category of the single author. Thus in the individualist definition, "I" always refers only to itself, without a collectivity *ever* being implicated by it. (32)

It is obvious from the above, therefore, that Gusdorf's position is simply a universalisation of the European male subject and that he possibly assumed that others do not write autobiography. This disposition shows that there is something peculiar about western self histories of subjectivity and Gusdorf's position is a very important contribution to the discourse on the autobiography. It is most likely a description of the autobiography as it has been performed implicitly or explicitly by a certain variety of western, primarily male, writers. This position is plausible because there are counter-hegemonic autobiographical narratives, which have already challenged this "pre-given" individualist form. Examples are studies on the use of the autobiography to narrate the lives of women subjects. For example, Rita Felski coined the term "feminist confessional" to describe the sub-genre of autobiographical writing which presents "'the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" in order to create a bond between "female author and female reader" (Cited in Lyn and Webb, 1999). Thus, as Mostern (2004) warns,

> As critics we are capable of the twin mistakes of assuming that autobiography must reproduce these notions of subjectivity, or of assuming that any text written by a person outside the correct race, nation, gender or class position will inevitably provide a different perspective (42).

It would be correct, therefore, to say that Gusdorf's "conditions and limits of autobiography" are wrong. Instead, his description of the autobiography could perhaps be the best description of one perspective on the issue of autobiography, which testifies to the fact that there other perspectives and descriptions of the genre. As Kenneth Mostern (2004) further observes, quoting Carolyn Heilbrun, (1988):

> That we are always confronted with individualist ideology when studying autobiography is best illustrated with reference to writers whose field of study is narrower than "autobiography" but whose assumptions are as equally individualist as Gusdorf's.

> Looking at Carolyn Heilbrun on the problems of writing women's "life stories," Arnold Ramparsad's essay on African-American autobiography, or Albert Stone's elaborately multi-ethnic *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts* will illustrate, if nothing else, that for the willful reader *any* autobiography can be read through the framework of an all important individual subject, regardless of its explicit content.(42)

For instance, Doris Sommer (1988) attempts to break away from the individualism in autobiography by demonstrating the peculiarity of what can be described as a difference genre of life writing, the Latin American *testimonio* (testimonial). She argued that to read the autobiography solely from the Western individualistic perspective and assumptions will disqualify the *testimonio* from being described as autobiography; "it might be thoroughly inappropriate to use the term 'autobiography' at all in thinking about them" (Doris Sommer, 1988:110). Sommer explained that the *testimonio* is not just a variant of the autobiography but that this will be the case if autobiography is understood solely from the perspective of Western essentialist critics. She observes:

> My own casual impulse to recuperate testimonials into autobiography […] dramatizes at least one danger for First World readers. By understating the difference, we may miss the potential in what I am calling the testimonials' collective self: the possibility to get beyond the gap between public and private spheres and beyond the often helpless solicitude that has plagued Western women even more than men since the rise of capitalism. To read testimonials as if they were merely a variation of autobiography would reinforce [our] habit of conflating human culture and history with the lives of extraordinary individuals. (110)

It is obvious from these reactions that the Eurocentric and patriarchal descriptions of the autobiography are problematic and do not account for autobiographical narratives in other parts of the world outside Europe and by the female gender. Many contemporary critics, such as already discussed above, see the autobiography as the writing of a collective experience, especially when women's stories are concerned. The autobiography is seen as a useful genre for the representation of women's fragmented voices, which have been otherwise silenced under patriarchy. In other words, it can be theorised, taking from Sommer's idea of collective "self", that all autobiography includes, in some measure, testimony, that is, the construction of a "we".

Gudmundsdóttir (2003) observed that in the past thirty years or so, there have been a proliferation of theoretical perspectives on autobiography, which border on issues of gender, and ethnic minorities. This, according to Gudmundsdóttir, is due to various reasons one of which is its suitability for the representation of many contemporary realities and experiences:

> Autobiography – in its various guises - can capture and address many contemporary concerns, for example the status of the subject, the relations and representations of ethnicity and gender, and perhaps most importantly question the individual's relationship with the past. Autobiographical writing can thereby reflect some of the main preoccupations of postmodernism, which has often been defined in terms of questions about our knowledge of the past and the difficulty of articulating our relationship to it.(1).

The view that the autobiography expresses the relationship of the individual to the communities was also argued by Stephen Butterfield (1974) who noted that the view had been demonstrated by black autobiography studies over and over. According to Butterfield, the unity of the personal and the collective voice is a dominant tradition in black autobiography. According to him,

> The appeal of black autobiographies is in their political awareness, their empathy for suffering, their ability to break down the division of "I" and "you," their knowledge of oppression and discovery of ways to cope with that experience, and their sense of shared life, shared triumph, and communal responsibility. The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self. (3)

The bottom line is that the traditional definition of autobiography as a product of individualism, which is essentially self promoting, is the definition by a particular section of Western society and therefore, made in their image. It is a perspective associated with and limited to a group of essentialist critics who think that the world is defined by their narrow and uninformed view of life. From observable features of autobiography in most underdeveloped parts of the world, autobiography with a collective voice is a form of counter-narrative that seeks to challenge the versions of social history by grand and master narratives. Using the language of the Marxists, it is the proletariat's autobiography: the autobiography of the oppressed.

Self narratives from other parts of the world confirm this as they reveal the socio-cultural context of the autobiography. This counter-hegemonic disposition is also post-colonial because it is a conscious deconstruction of the "master narrative" and the

European mainstream literary paradigm and epistemology. It is particularly evident in contemporary post-colonial travel writings. Travel writings are characteristically autobiographical. As Maria Lopez Ropero (2003) notes, the post-colonial travelogue, which is the product of the late twentieth century, is involved in socio-political discourses:

> Postcolonial travelogue is one of travel writing's most prolific and innovative off-springs in the late twentieth-century [...] .The socio-political changes brought about by the new century have dramatically altered the motivation and subject matter of a genre that has traditionally been involved in European expansionism and the construction of Europe's *Other*. Once vehicles for cultural prejudice serving official purposes, contemporary travel accounts have become powerful instrument of cultural critique (51)

2. 4 The sub-genre of the autobiographical poetry

Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) note in their essay on trends in the Nigerian autobiography that despite the fact that the genre of the autobiography cuts across the three main genres of literature, namely prose, drama and poetry, the most critically explored is the prose autobiography. This notwithstanding, the existence of the poetic-autobiography has been acknowledged by scholars over time (M.H. Abrams, 1953; Marjorie G. Perloff, 1970; Bede M. Ssensalo, 1977; Robert Renhder, 1981; Oriaku. R. O, 1990; Toyin Falola, 2008; Dasylva and Oriaku, 2010). The observation is that poetic-autobiography is not common. According to Niyi Afolabi (2003),

> [...] not many poets have written their autobiographies in the verse medium. From Camara Laye's *The African Child*, Wole Soyinka's *Ake* or *Isara*, Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, through Tanure Ojaide's *Great Boys*, prose has been the norm of autobiography even for renowned poets while poetry remains a deviation from the norm (548).

Toyin Falola (2008) and Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) note the marginal status of autobiographical poetry in critical discourses. According to Falola (2008), "writing autobiographies is currently the norm in the creative world, but autobiographical poetry are not very common"(xi). Dasylva and Oriaku (2010) observed that despite the existence of autobiography in the poetic genre, not much or adequate critical attention has been given to this sub-genre of autobiography (303). The common notion is that the autobiography is usually written in sustained narration. As Oriaku (1990) notes, the expectation of many readers is that an autobiography must be written in "a sustained and

often complex story line, the portrayal of clearly distinct and palpable characters and settings, and the alternation of sequences of description and dialogue in the course of the narration" (216). For instance, Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiography as "the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his, especially upon the story of his personality" (Cited in Afolabi, 2003:550). Therefore, there is "the seeming strangeness of any talk about poetry as autobiography" (Oriaku, 1990: 216). This is possibly due to the structure of poetry as usually versified narrative, which in addition to its economy of words, relies on "concise and imagistic presentation of experience for the communication of its ideas" (Oriaku, 1990: 216).

However, apart from the fact that there are narrative poems which tell "obvious" story like in prose narrative, poetry is densely autobiographical. Oriaku (1990) explained that more than any other genre of literature, poetry is used for expression of private experience. It presents life as an individual experience (217). Rather than presenting the "external details" and reality of life, poetry "dwells more on perceptions of and feelings or attitudes towards experience", such that "what autobiographical poetry lacks in the presentation of external details it makes up for in its portrayal of inner feelings" (217). This view was also expressed by Robert Pheder (1981):

> Poets live their lives in the same world as men of affairs, only poetry, like all arts, is primarily a response to the conditions of the inner rather than the outer life. Poetry is a way of accommodating the changes that take place within us (41)

Although the dichotomy between the "inner feelings" and "external details" is arguable, it is not the objective of this study. However, it should be stated that all genres of literature deal with the inner feelings and external details, although the manner these are articulated and the degree of narrative details vary from one genre to another. Essentially, what distinguishes poetry from prose and drama is the manner in which it explores the resources of language and sounds. Poetry is figurative in the representation of life experiences and is particularly appropriate for the immediacy of expression. This possibly is what William Wordsworth meant when he defined poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that are recollected in tranquility (1979: 22). Thus, as M.H. Abrams (1953) explains,

> A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions,

> thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from facts to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind (Cited in Oriaku, 1990: 219).

Although Marjorie G. Perloff (1970) noted that some critics like Stanley Kauffmann, Conor Cruise O' Brien, Northrop Frye, and Wayne Shumaker have drawn attention to the fact the boundary between "autobiography and the conventional genres is becoming narrower", he argued that the dissolution or the blurring of the traditional boundaries between "the poet's autobiography and his autobiographical poems" is a recent development. According to him, autobiographical poetry was first experimented by Goethe who also was the first poet to write a prose autobiography with "the structure and coherence of a work of art" (Cited in Oriaku, 1990: 220). Thus the brevity which characterizes many autobiographies or autobiographical writings is the essential quality of poetry. Stephen Shapiro described this brevity as "the brief self-image, as distinct from the entire autobiography (Oriaku 222).

Bede M. Ssensalo (1977) also argued that all work of art is essentially autobiographical since the artists who wrote were usually inspired by their personal life. This must be what Attah Anthony Agbali (2008) had in mind when he described poetry as ethnographic and a portrait of the observed mindscape:

> Poetry constitutes a form of interiorized ethnography that depicts the observational state of the mind in taking mental notes of its milieu and cryptically verbalizing these notes through the medium of versed texts. Within such powerful renditions, the world of human beings and nature is critically assessed creatively and presented in rhapsodies and prosodies that reference the relationship of being within the depth of being (existence). In this sense, a human being experiences a profound confrontation with oneself and one's existential universe that enables the creation of the purview of hominized meaning. (Falola and Aderonke 2008: 30)

He explained that the poetic genre is a veritable means of revealing myths, oral histories, social histories, and personal narratives. According to him, poetry provides

> great creative and luxuriantly insightful ethnographic perspectives regarding the framework of the authors' vision and the social structures and personal narratives that shape their poetic perception […]. Poetry constitutes a web that spun different expressive thoughts and texts into holistic frameworks and collectives that are capable of sense-making.[It] is not merely a redundant formulae but is equally alive as a production of meaning, amply constructed as a universe of symbolic meanings and textual characters (30).

Such [poetic] renditions of human experience and of nature are the result of interaction and "profound confrontation" between or with oneself and "one's existential universe". This is reminiscent of Reed-Danahay's (1997) description of autoethnographical writing as the ability to transcend the everyday conception of "selfhood and social life[…]" (4), which involves the writing of the self and the society.

2.5 Autobiography, ethnography and the questions of self-reflexivity and objectivity

The usefulness of autobiography in articulating the social space authentically has, however, been contested by traditional anthropologists. According to this school, autobiography is too subjective and prejudiced to be reliable as a source of social history. Instead, they argued that authentic social history is possible only through ethnographic research and documentation, which they believe is an objective presentation of reality.

John Van Maanen describes ethnography, when used as a research method, as typically a "fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more" (Cited in Michael Genzuk, 2003: 1). Harris and Orna Johnson, describes ethnography as literally "'a portrait of a people' [...] a written description of a particular culture – the customs, beliefs, and behavior – based on information collected through fieldwork" (Cited in Genzuk, 2003: 1). David M.Fetterman (1998)'s definition reinforces the basic aspect of the traditional ethnography as "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Genzuk, 2003: 1). Common to these definitions of ethnography are the understanding that it is about the study of culture, and that it involves fieldwork through participant observation. These qualities are summed up by Michael Genzuk (2003) in his description of ethnography as a

> means of tapping local points of view, households and community "funds of knowledge" (Moll and Greenberg, 1990), a means of identifying categories of human experience up close and personal. Ethnography enhances and widens top down views and enriches the inquiry process, taps both bottom-up insights and perspectives of powerful policy-makers "at the top", and generates new analytic insights by engaging in interactive, team exploration of often subtle arenas of human difference and similarity. Through such findings ethnographers may inform others of their findings with an attempt to derive, for example,

> policy decisions or instructional innovations from such an analysis (2).

The essence of participant observation is to enable the researcher experience the cultural situation that is studied, to get as close as possible to the subject that is being observed in its natural setting. This is believed to make the narrative factual and descriptive. In other words, what are eventually accepted as the ethnographic report are the points of view of the participant-ethnographers as they recorded them. To give some credibility to the ethnographer's account, various degrees of participation have been identified ranging from complete separation from the activities observed, in which case the researcher is a spectator, to complete immersion as a full participant, almost as an insider. In this case the researcher does not only see what is happening but also feels it as an insider so that the narrative is written from the "I" witness perspective. The purpose of this method, Genzuk (2003) explains, is to enable the ethnographer to experience the situation they study:

> Experiencing an environment as an insider is what necessitates the participant part of participant observation. At the same time, however, there is clearly an observer side to this process. The challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the experience as an insider while describing the experience for outsiders (3).

Genzuk, however, argues that the extent to which a researcher can become a full participant depends on the nature of the culture being observed (Genzuk, 2003: 3). The aim of this method is to ensure authenticity of narrative voice, and thus ethnographic authority. As David Hayano (1979) argued, a researcher may, through socialisation or other "intimate familiarity with a group," gain the "insider" perspective and thus, status (100).

The relationship of the researcher to the subject being studied and the process of writing the story or report are supposed to distinguish autobiography from ethnography and determine the authenticity or otherwise of their writing forms of social history. However, more studies on ethnography have revealed its increasingly autobiographical nature. For instance, Reed-Danahay (1997:9) notes that the life story has ethnographic interest. This view is in consonance with Irving Louis Horowitz's (1977) description of autobiography as "an 'enterprise' which in some sense demonstrates that we cannot fulfill ourselves unless we are members of a group in whom there is a community of attitudes" (174). In other words, autobiography involves the writing of the self within

socio-cultural context. In this vein, Reed-Danahay (1997) argues that there is a kind of interrelation between autobiography and ethnography:

> Increasingly, ethnography is auto/biographical and auto/ biography reflects cultural and social frames of reference. Much recent work in the study of personal narrative done by anthropologist has already pointed in this direction. The concept of a "social poetics" as used by Michael Herzfeld (1985 and 1996) reflects this duality of self-reference and cultural reference… (9).

This view has been championed by postmodern anthropologists who observe that ethnography has become increasingly self-reflexive and personal, thereby further bridging the gap between it and the autobiographical writings. Judith Stacey (1988) describes this dimension of ethnography as "postmodern ethnography" which, according to her, is "critical and self-reflexive ethnography and a literature of meditation on the inherent, but often unacknowledged hierarchical and power-laden relations of ethnographic writing" (24). Stacey compares this kind of ethnography, which she also terms "critical ethnography", to feminist writing:

> Like feminist scholars, critical ethnographers tear the veil from scientific pretensions of neutral observation or description. They attempt to bring to their research an awareness that ethnographic writing is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other (24).

James Clifford (1986) describes this condition as the "historical predicament of ethnography", which he argues is "the fact that it is always caught up in the intervention, not the representation of cultures" (2). Judith Stacey further explains the transformation that postmodern ethnography brings into ethnographic research by arguing that the postmodern ethnographic solution to the predicament of the anthropologist is to "fully acknowledge the limitations of ethnographic process and product and to reduce their claims" (25). She argued that critical ethnographers are aware of this limitation and therefore, acknowledge "the interpretive authorial self" (25) by experimenting with dialogic forms of ethnographic representation. This kind of ethnographic representation places more of the voices and perspectives of the ethnographer in the narrative and thus, authenticate the ethnographic research process. In the manner of the critical ethnographer, Susan Krieger (1991) questions the traditional social scientists' expectation that the researcher should not influence their writing through self indulgence. She argued that it is inevitable for the ethnographer's self to be involved in

the process of ethnographic writing, which underscores its self-reflexivity. According to Krieger,

> Traditionally [...] social science has viewed the self of the social scientist as a contaminant. The self – the unique inner life of an observer – is a variable we are taught to minimize in our studies, to counter, to balance or to neutralize. We are advised to avoid self-indulgence, not to view other people in our own image and to speak in a manner that suggests that what we know is not particular to our individual way of knowing it.
>
> I wish to suggest that the self is not a contaminant, but rather it is key to what we know, and that methodological discussions might fruitfully be revised to acknowledge the involvement of the self in a positive manner. The self is not something that can be disengaged from knowledge or from research processes. Rather we need to understand the nature of our participation in what we know. The problem we need worry about is not the effect of an observer's inner self on evidence from the outside world, but the ways that the traditional dismissal of the self may hinder the development of each individual's unique perspective (1991:29-30).

Postmodern ethnography is influenced by deconstructionist posturing to cultural studies and concerns only what James Clifford (1986) termed "Partial Truths". According to Clifford, ethnographic truths are only partial and are incomplete. Therefore, he explained that ethnographers' acknowledgement and acceptance of these facts would build "into ethnographic art a rigorous sense of partiality that can be a source of representational tact" (7). This understanding of ethnographic research demonstrates its subjectivity as self-reflexive writing. This also, as is the case with feminist "methodological reflections," acknowledges the limitation of cross-cultural and interpersonal understanding and representation (Stacey, 1988: 25). The admissions that ethnography is inherently subjective and self-reflexive informs the different approaches to contemporary ethnography which embraces the idea that other or alternative genres of cultural narratives such as short stories, novels, and poetry as well as traditional scholarly reports of personal experience can be used to express cultural experience, provocative and powerful cultural phenomena. This alternative method of representing culture and self, which combines both the elements of ethnography and autobiography, has been termed "Autoethnography".

2.6 Autoethnography and Ethno-autobiography

Autoethnography has been defined variously and from different perspectives. It has been described both as a research method and a text; a genre of writing and research that connects the self to a cultural and social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9). As a text, and like the autobiography or autobiographical writings, Autoethnography is usually written in the first person narrative point of view and "features dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational stories affected by history, social structure, and culture" (Holt 2003, 2; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). According to Reed-Danahay (1997), whatever the emphasis of the writing on the *graphy* (the research process), *ethnos* (the culture), or the *auto* (i.e. the self), what is peculiar about Autoethnography is that authors employ their personal experiences in relation to a culture reflexively in order to explore the interaction of the two. Therefore, the concept of Autoethnography "reflects a changing conception of both the self and society in the late twentieth century" (Reed-Danahay1997:2; 1994; Giddens 1991).

Autoethnography is described as combining the qualities of both autobiography and ethnography so that it is characterised by the narration of the self and the representation of culture. This quality of Autoethnography is described by Reed-Danahay as the critique and synthesis of the qualities of ethnography and autobiography. According to Reed-Danahay, Autoethnography

> […] synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto) ethnography can be signaled by "Autoethnography" (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 2).

In essence, Autoethnography stands at the "intersection" of three genres of writing: '(1) "native anthropology", in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; (2) "ethnic autobiography", personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) "autobiographical ethnography", in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing. In "autobiographical ethnography", anthropologists are explicit in the manner they explore links between their own

autobiographies and their practices of ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997:2). The implication of this is that Autoethnography takes care of the limitations of the traditional ethnography in which strict objectivity is a condition for authenticity of social narration. It also fills the gap created by the overt personalization of the conventional autobiographical writings. This actually takes care of fragmentation of knowledge thereby synthesizing the split between the representation of the self and the culture. As Reed-Danahay further notes,

> When the dual nature of the meaning of Autoethnography is apprehended, it is a useful term with which to question the binary conventions of self /society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective. The postmodern / postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement, and of shifting axes of power. These are all reflected in the move towards new forms of theory and writing… (1997: 2).

While discussing the act of self-narration and the 'tension between creativity and restraint associated with that act in various political contexts,' Reed-Danahay observes that there are two major developments in cultural studies, namely: "debates about representation (by whom and about whom), and the increasing trend toward self-reflexivity in all realms of writing" (1997: 1). This acknowledges the fact that ethnographic writings and research are also inherently self-reflexive just like autobiographical writings so that the authenticity and credibility of the texts are determined by the involvement of authors in the cultures they describe. This characterizes the insider/outsider dichotomy and defines the autobiographical role observation of the ethnographer (Leon Anderson, 2006:376). As David Hayano argued, there has been a move away from the colonial era of ethnography which is characterised by a detachment that makes true participation impossible of the study of "social world and subcultures" of which the researchers are part. Anderson (2006) also explains that, "in contrast to the detach-outsider characteristic of colonial anthropologist, contemporary anthropologist would frequently be full members of the cultures they studied" (376). This echoes Reed-Danahay's (1997) observation that postmodern and postcolonial theories and engagements of modernist and colonial dispositions have altered the way contemporary research and writing of life story/history are done:

> The changing nature of fieldwork in post-colonial and post-modern world, in tandem with new theoretical trends in anthropology since the 1980s, have, however, meant that studies of life stories and personal narratives are informed by different

> questions than different approaches (Reed-Danahay 1997: 1; Cole 1992; Waston and Waston-Franke 1985).

Essentially, autoethnography, as texts that critique the interrelation of the self with others and in a social context, stemmed from postmodern "crisis of representation" in anthropological writing (Tami Spry, 2001; Behar and Gordon,1995; Clifford, 1988; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Conquergood 1985, 1991, 1998; Geertz 1973, 1988; Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Myerhoff,1979, 1982; Trihn, 1989, 1991; Turner, 1982, 1987) in which case autoethnography "is a radical reaction to realist agendas in ethnography and sociology 'which privileges the researcher over the subject, method over subject matter, and maintain commitments to outmoded conceptions of validity, truth, and generalizability" (Spry 2001: 20). Autoethnographic writing like post-structuralism resists grand theorizing and the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth. Anderson (2006) explains this transformation of ethnographic research method as revolutionary, self-conscious and autobiographical or biographical as the case might be:

> If this is the case, then the autoethnographer is someone who helps to form and reform the constructs that she or he studies. The autoethnographer is a more analytical and self-conscious participant in the conversation than is the typical group member, who may seldom take a particularly abstract or introspective orientation to the conversation and activities. But the autoethnographer's understandings, both as a member and as a researcher, emerge not from detached discovery but from engaged dialogue (382).

This view is buttressed by Charlotte Davies who argued that the personal involvement and influence of the ethnographer in the composition of their report underscores the reflexivity of the narration or account. According to her, "in its most transparent guise, reflexivity expresses researchers' awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it" (1999: 7). For Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003), "[Auto]ethnographers-as-authors frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self" (62). They observe that ethnographic data used for the writing are contextualised within the ethnographer's personal experience and sense making which unavoidably make them integral part of "the representational processes in which they are engaging" (62). This, in essence, includes them in the story they tell. Therefore, the idea of ethnographers' objectivity is questionable just as the possibility of an absolute objective observer is unrealizable. Charlotte Davies describes Anderson's notion of "reflexive ethnography"

(autoethnography) as an attempt to "seek to develop forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience as an intrinsic part of research" (5). This is despite the view of scholars like Geertz (1988) who have argued that visibly incorporating subjective experience into ethnographic work could result in "author saturated texts."

Ruth Behar (1996) also argued that self involvement in ethnographic research is not "a decorative flourish". Instead, she notes that "the exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise go to" (14). Anderson describes this as the possibility that self-reflexivity "can take us to the depths of personal feeling, leading us to be emotionally moved and sympathetically understanding" (385). He thus described this as "evocative autoethnography" which quality it shared with various other first-person narratives such as fiction, autobiography, poetry, and "a significant amount of traditional ethnography" (385). He argues that the problem of "self-absorbed digression" becomes a problem only when the ethnographer is an outsider. When the ethnographer is an insider, he explains that the problem of self-absorption does not arise because it becomes ordinarily impossible for detached observation. He sees this as the difference between "evocative autoethnography" and what he termed "analytical autoethnography". According to him, unlike evocative autoethnography, the aim of which is to ensure narrative fidelity to the researcher's subjective experience alone, "analytical autoethnography is grounded in self-experience but reaches beyond it as well" (386). This position is similar to what Tami Spry (2001) described as "performing autoethnography". According to her,

> Autoethnographic performance is the convergence of the "autobiographic impulse" and the "ethnographic moment" represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the innersanctions of the always migratory identity […] autoethnographic performance makes us acutely conscious of how we "I-witness" our own reality constructions. Interpreting culture through the self-reflections and cultural reflections of identity is a defining feature of autoethnographic performance (706).

Autoethnography is a multidisciplinary concept which has been employed variously by literary critics, anthropologists, and sociologists. This implies that it means different things to these different groups of scholars. Autoethnography is employed as a research method, as a text, and / or as a concept (Reed-Danahay 1997: 4). The

conceptual history of the term can be traced along two directions: as primarily ethnographic concept and as concerning life history (Reed-Danahay 1997: 4).

One of the earliest usages of the term was by Karl Heider (1975). Heider used the term in connection with a report he did on Dani concept of "what Dani do", which was based upon his questioning of 60 schoolchildren, and labelled "Dani auto-ethnography." According to Heider, "auto" stands for "autochthonous", since it is Dani's account of "what people do"; "auto" also stands for automatic, since it is 'the simplest routine-eliciting technique imaginable' (1975: 3; Reed-Danahay 1997: 4).

David Hayano (1979), however, saw the concept of "autoethnography" differently. To him autoethnography is "a set of issues relating to studies by anthropologists of their 'own people'" (99). In this case it is the "insider" status of the writer which marks the autoethnography, so that any research that is conducted by an anthropologist "among a distinctly different group than their own" will not be termed autoethnography, though he did not use the term to describe the "native "anthropologist (Reed-Danahay 1997: 5). Hayano is of the opinion that a researcher may, through socialization or other "intimate familiarity with a group," gain the "insider" perspective and thus, status. As far as he was concerned, the most important measure is that autoethnographers "possess the qualities of often permanent self-identification with a group and full internal membership, as recognized both by themselves and the people of whom they are a part" (1979: 100). He, however, distinguishes "autoethnography" and autobiographical writing and dismisses what he calls "self-ethnographic" texts because of their limited applicability to address other cultural members (Cited in Reed-Danahay 1997: 5).

In his review of new approaches to the writing of autoethnography, John Van Maanan (1995: 8-9) suggests four types of what he calls "alternatives to ethnographic realism": (1) the confessional ethnographies in which the attention is on the ethnographer (the signifier) rather than on the "native" (the signified); (2) the dramatic ethnography; (3) critical ethnographers; and (4) self- or auto-ethnographies, in which the culture of one's own group is textualised. In other words, autoethnography is a form of writing in which the ethnographer is a native (Reed-Danahay 1997: 5). As Marilyn Strathern (1987: 17) defines it, "auto-ethnography" is "anthropology carried out in the social context which produced it." These three descriptions of Autoethnography stress the essential relationship of the autoethnographer to the social context of their experience (Reed-Danahay 1997: 5). However, Strathern (1987); Herzfeld (1997)

Motzafi-Haller (1997), and Caroline Brettell (1997) have questioned the insider/outsider dichotomy.

In her essay, "Writing Birthright: On Native Anthropologist and the Politics of Representation" Pnina Motzafi-Haller (1997) confronts and interrogates the question of authenticity of the native anthropologist through "an autobiographical professional development and ambivalent identity" (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 15). Underscoring the fact that *most* anthropologists came from the "here" and left "home" to study "them" in remote, far-away locations "out there", she asks:

> So why has the question of "natives studying natives" burst into the very heart of anthropological discourse today, threatening, according to some, the very existence of the discipline? And why, at the very moment that anthropological theory has moved away from the essentializing depiction of "communities" and of unified collective identities into an exploration of the imaginative and contested construction of boundaries and multiple identities, has the distinctive identity of the scholar as "native," "halfi," "marginal" or "hybrid" become central? (196).

Motzafi-Haller is of the opinion that it is possible to write within and move between these two positions, which she termed "a double experience," both as "native" and "outsider". She argues that this double experience "with its inversion of hierarchy and power relations in one frame, intends to complicate the question of authorship and representation" (197). According to her, this is a question that underlies much contemporary critical discussion within disciplines of anthropology and postcolonial studies (197). Reacting to Judith Okely's (1992) argument that "autobiography dismantles the positivist machine" and that "positivism destroys the notion of experience," Motzfi-Haller argued that the positivist critique, which may argue that "you don't have your 'facts' straight;" and so "you need to read more" to "support your argument with better 'data'" can be deflected. She observed that "the power – and the 'truth' – of this and other autobiographical accounts, is that they can be undermined on such positivist terms;" and that their "reality," and poignancy is a given, "built into the very definition of a lived experience" (218). She, therefore, argues:

> By collapsing the categories of native and non-native, subject and object, researcher and subject of study, I hope to go beyond the strict laws of the genre identified with traditional social-science practices. This is making me a better, not less able anthropologist and analyst (219).

In her essay entitled, 'Blurred Genres and Blended Voices: Life History, Biography, Autobiography, and the Auto/Ethnography of Women's Lives', Caroline Brettell (1997) discusses the increasing blurring of the margins between various genres of life narrations and interrogates the continued desire to delineate boundaries between them especially as it concerns the task of writing about women's lives. Drawing inspiration from Clifford Geertz's essay on the blurring of genres and the re-figuration of social thought in which he observed that there is a significant amount of genre mixing in postmodern intellectual life, Brettell argues that "it is difficult both to situate authors within particular disciplines and to classify their works" (223). For instance, Clifford Geertz (1983: 20) observed there are lots of interdisciplinary practices in recent writings which include:

> philosophical inquiries looking like literary criticism, scientific discussions looking like belles lettres *Morceaux*, baroque fantasies presented as deadpan empirical observations, histories that consist of equations and tables […] documentaries that read like true confessions, parables posing as ethnographies, theoretical treaties set out as travelogues, ideological arguments cast as historiographical inquiries.

Brettell argued that the problematic perspective of life history in anthropology which was before on the questions of representativeness and objectivity has shifted as the debates today are centered on the issue of "authorial hand of the ethnographer" (227). According to her, much of the late twentieth century discussions of writings of social experience have been done chiefly with focus on the authorial voice, the nature of life history, and particularly, the various ways in which women's lives are written (226). For example, she described a book that she wrote about her mother as an enterprise in genres mixture. According to her,

> As a book by a daughter about a mother who was a writer, this text involves a blending of voices and, by extension, a blurring of genres. It draws on a variety of sources and it describes a number of cultural contexts. It is both biography and autobiography, not only because it weaves my words with those of my mother but also because the lives of a mother and daughter are inextricably intertwined (228-9).

She, therefore, suggests that this sort of life narrative which can be described both as a biography or autobiography, "can also be viewed as autoethnography in the sense that, as my mother wrote about herself or others, she was also 'writing culture' – engaging in the world through her own experience as both a participant and an observer"

(230). This buttresses Comaroff and Comaroff's (1992) argument that "Biography –the optic that fuses individual and event into both a worldview and a narrative genre- lies at the methodological core of much ethnography and history" (25). Paul Kendall (1965) also noted, a biography is inherently autobiographical as it "uneasily shelters an autobiography within it" (Cited in Brettell, 1997:245).

There are other approaches to Autoethnography which stress the autobiographical meaning of the term. For example, Stanley Brandes (1982), though he did not use the term Autoethnography, described the form of life history that was used by anthropologists in the early 1980s which explains the trend that has characterised recent theories of autoethnography. According to Brandes, "ethnographic autobiography", as he described it, is "a strictly first-person narrative told by 'a commoner, an ordinary member of his or her society' " (188-189). He also identified an important new genre which he described as "anthropological autoethnography" in which case "the anthropologist himself is the autoethnographical subject" (202). What can be deduced from Brandes' descriptions of Autoethnography as genres of life writing, therefore, is that it is both ethnographical and autobiographical narration about a culture and about a life (Reed-Danahay 1997: 6).

Norman Denzin (1989), in his description of life stories, distinguishes several different forms of what he calls "biographical method": autobiography, ethnography, autoethnography, biography, ethnography story, oral history, case study, life history, life story, self story, and personal experience story (27). Citing Crapanzano's *Tuhami* as an example of this genre, Denzin describes 'auto-ethnography' "as a text which blends ethnography and autobiography" (Cited in Reed-Danahay 1997: 6). In his opinion, what characterizes an autoethnography is that the writer must not adopt the "objective outsider" convention of writing that is common to traditional ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997: 6). By implication, Denzin suggests that Autoethnography entails the incorporation of elements of one's own life experience when writing about others either as a biography or as ethnography. This description is, however, different from both straight ethnography and life history or autobiography. Rather, it is similar to the perspective of Philippe Lejeune (1989), who, while criticising the outsider ethnographer, describes the development of "ethnobiography" and "autoethnology" as a way of avoiding what he sees as the gap, or screen, of ethnology. According to him, the authenticity or credibility of narrative is masked by ethnology while ethnobiography and autoethnology represent more directly and credibly the voices of peasants and the

working class (Cited in Reed-Danahay1997:7).

Mary Louise Pratt (1992; 1994), a literary critic, connects the concept of Autoethnography to the relationships between the colonised and the coloniser, and to modes of resistance to dominant discourses offered by native account. She, however, sees Autoethnography as "a form of ethnography of one's own culture, rather than a piece of autobiography" (Reed-Danahay 1997: 7). Therefore, she describes Autoethnography as follow:

> […] a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them […].Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autoch-thonous or 'authentic' forms of self-representation […]. Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding (1994:28).

In Pratt's opinion, autoethnographies are forms of writing that address both the cultural group of the writer and that of a wider and dominant one in a very transgressive manner. This perspective is resonant of post-colonialists' interrogations of the colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies. This view is echoed by Linda Park-Fuller (2000:26) who describes autobiographical narrative performances as a genre in which "the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression" in which case the art of story-telling itself becomes an act of transgression through which what is kept hidden is publicized and what is silenced is spoken. This becomes "an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics."

Similarly, Mark Neuman (1996:191) describes Autoethnography as "a form of critique and resistance" that is present in many and diverse literatures including ethnic autobiography, fiction, memoir, and other texts which "identify zones of contact, conquest, and the contested meanings of self and culture that accompanies the exercise of representational authority." In other words, autoethnographies are not mere documentations of the self and social experiences but interrogative and ideological texts that seek to deconstruct hegemonies and marginalized self and social other. This idea of interrogation of master narratives is addressed by Spry (2001) in her testimonial on the importance of performing Autoethnography:

> For me, performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally. Performing

> autoethnography has encouraged me to dialogically look back upon my self as other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate, and embrace (708).

John Dorst (1989) employs Autoethnography in a different way, though similar to that of Pratt and Lejeune. He views Autoethnography as post-ethnography. According to him,

> If the task of ethnography can be described as the inscription and interpretation of culture, then postmodernity seems to render the professional ethnographer superfluous [and] […]the impulse for self-documentation and the reproduction of images of the self pervade our everyday practice" (2-3).

Here, Dorst seems to make case for the biographical and autobiographical dimension of ethnography and the fact that narration of the self and culture is no longer the preserve of some professional ethnographers who are supposed to interpret the cultural experience of the other group "objectively". Rather, he sees contemporary realities as that which facilitate self documentations of personal experiences as defined by the writers' socio-cultural domains.

In her description of biographical writings, Birgitta Svensson (1997) observed that biography which means simply 'writing life' has acquired a normative power in modern society, as a way to order life and time just as a map orders the world and space. She, however, argues that the constructions of biographies are not just subjectivisations but also objectivisations. According to her, "we must consider what constructions are socially, historically, and politically possible and how they are part of a larger metanarrative" (99). She further explains:

> We live in a biographical era, where there are different life scripts to relate to. Both life and time are biographically ordered in modernity. Apart from the fact that we construct reality biographically, we also live our lives biographically. Modern existence is ordered as an autobiographical presentation. On the basis of different life perspectives, we shape the present against the background of our earlier history and with our sights set on the future. Autobiography requires great self-knowledge and well-developed reflexive self, and some people are more skilled than others at writing their lives in harmony with the spirit of the age. (99-100)

Svensson examined the power exercised in the autobiographical account and concluded that since the writing of life history has become very important and central in

the late modernity, it has also become "the mantra of ethnographic research" (72). In her attempt to deconstruct the descriptive organisation of lives in biographical terms, Svensson describes biography as "a way of constructing coherent pasts that make sense to the present" (72). According to her, to view the life from such a constructionist point of view makes it possible to examine how representations of the life course can be used and are used as means of social control.

From all the above, the main contention and distinction in the various usages of Autoethnography so far has been whether or not it connotes autobiography or ethnography and the role of the author or autoethnographer in this. From Pratt, Van Maanan, Hayano, Dorst and Strathern's perspectives, the concept seems to connote a form of "native ethnography", a study of one's own group. In this case, the issues raised concern those of authenticity of the narrative voice and of "counternarrative" when the autoethnographer is not a professional anthropologist. When the autoethnographer is a professional anthropologist, the issue is that of methodology used in doing ethnography "at home", especially when the longstanding tradition of ethnographic study of "others" is considered (Reed-Danahay 1997: 8-9).

On the other hand, when Autoethnography is tied to the practice of autobiography, as discussed by Lejeune, Brandes, Denzin, and Deck, it then concerns more closely ethnographic autobiography or native autobiography rather than ethnography. But as Reed-Danahay (1997:2) explains, Autoethnography actually concerns several things and as such it stands in the intersection of multiple genres of writing and discourses at the centre of which are issues of representation and who represents what or who. "Who speaks and on behalf of whom are vital questions to ask of all ethnographic and auto-biographical writing. Who represents whose life, and how, are central topics in our current age of bureaucratization" (Danahay 1997: 3). However, it seems Autoethnography has been "assumed" to be more authentic than straight ethnography. This is because the voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than that of the outsider in much current debate (Reed-Danahay 1997: 4). It is also expected to be counter-discursive and interrogative of social and cultural relations and representations.

So far, four claims of Autoethnography are evident. These are:

a. That the claim to objectivity of ethnography is not valid. Rather, that ethnography is self-reflexive and evocative, therefore, subjective like any other human writing of life and culture;

b. That autobiography does not adequately represent the society but instead only provides the account of the autobiographer's life.

c. That Autoethnography adequately accommodates the essence of both ethnography and autobiography. Autoethnography has been described as the intersection of three genres, namely: native anthropology, ethnic autobiography and autobiographical ethnography. Therefore, it accounts for the self-reflexivity of autobiography and ethnography and the act of writing culture itself.

d. That autoethnography underscores the fact that contemporary life history/story has blurred the boundaries between genres. This establishes the argument of the syncretic school of genre theory that a text is defined not so much by a rigid set of features (form) but that texts are grouped to a great extent by *function*, the use to which the text is put.

The last point is buttressed by Irving Kenneth Zola (1995), a social scientist of more than four decades, from a personal experience:

> I argue, as have others in recent years that rather than "a contaminant", one's own biography can be a useful tool in social analysis. I place my personal struggle with this issue in a larger cultural context and point to a shift in the boundaries between public and private, which has profound implications for the way we teach, write and do research (5).

Due to the blurring of genres and the removing of the boundary between the public and the private, Autoethnography accommodates uniqueness of the writings of minority groups. However, while the above qualities of Autoethnography address adequately the questions of self-reflexivity and subjectivity of all writings of life history and underline the fact that writing of self is also a writing of culture, the term does not account for the primary aim of autobiography. Autobiography is a writing of one's biography by oneself rather than just a self-reflexive writing of culture. While it accounts for the "auto" (by self) and the "graphy" (writing) of autobiography, Autoethnography fails to account for the "bio" (the life history of the author) which is cardinal to all self-narratives. While Autoethnography explains the writing of culture self-reflexively by the author, autobiography concerns a biography (one's story) written by oneself. Therefore, Autoethnography cannot serve as an alternative to autobiography. In order to account for the "auto", and the "bio" of autobiography while at the same time stressing its inherent cultural constitution, a new concept, "Ethno-autobiography", is conceived.

Several terms have been developed to address different kinds of life narratives because of inadequacies of the traditional ones. For instance, due to the tremendous changes in ethnographic and cine-ethnographic practice that began in the 1950s, a lot of reevaluations have occurred in the practice of ethnographic film making. In this regard, two filmmakers, who though represent different periods in this shift, Bob Quinn and Pierre Perrault, have drawn attention to the inadequacy of ethnography to describe many contemporary life writings including filmmaking. Thus, Quinn adopted the term "ethnobiography" to describe this group of works. Citing David MacDougall, Jerry White (2003), describes ethnobiography as follow:

> Ethnobiography, whatever its aims as advocacy, attempts to create portraits of individuals of other cultures in some psychological and historical depth. While it is ostensibly a way of writing culture from the inside through an insider's perspective, it is framed by an outsider's concerns. In its doubling of subjectivities and its attempt to reconstitute the culturally different historical person it creates a conundrum, the charged space of an encounter (White 2003: 102).

Rosemary Geisdorfer (1990:101) describes ethnobiography as "an ethnologist's written version of an individual's oral autobiography". This in English would be described as edited autobiographies. That is, "autobiographies of those who do not write" (1990: 101). As Jean Poirier and Simone Clapier-Valladon (1980: 351) note,

> Ethnobiography aims at transcending the subject's purely individual experience through an investigation of the cultural models of the group, by encouraging a critical stance on the part of the subject himself, by relativizing the information through parallel studies, and by substantiating it through the application of suitable techniques.

Ethno-autobiography underscores the ethnography of the autobiography; it explains the fact that autobiography is not just a self propagating writing but a self-narrative that is culturally constituted. Autobiography is a self-reflexive narrative that constructs the narrator's self both as a private and public entity and as a critical subject. Self-understanding is achieved through critical exploration of the past as memory in the present. The past is understood in the present and the present is understood in the light of the past but the past is only meaningful in context of relationship to others as a collective. Therefore, ethno-autobiography is the biography of oneself written by oneself as a self criticism and a critique of the culture that defines that self. Ethno-autobiography transcends the subject's individual experience and involves a critical situation of that

individual as part of a collective existence of a society. As Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003) observed, "writing an autobiography involves negotiation between the public and the private, and between individual histories and history at large." (11). It is this negotiation between the private and the public; between the individual and collective histories that defines the cultural constitution of the autobiography.

2.7 Ethno-autobiography, autoethnography and the interface between ethnography and autobiography

The interface between ethnography and autobiography is defined in the conceptualisation of both ethnography and autobiography as autoethnography. The argument underscored by this conception is the fact that while the main interest of ethnographers is the study of the cultural other, it is nevertheless also the ethnographer's critique of the culture of the other which ordinarily acknowledges the subjectivity of the author, the ethnographer. It is believed that ethnographic knowledge is the product of the social situation of the ethnographer. Therefore, while the ethnographer studies and narrates the culture of the other, they invariably and indirectly narrate their own story, the story of their perspective on the culture studied and their involvement with it. Even in the case of interview with the cultural 'others' the ethnographic record produced from the interlocution is essentially constructed by the ethnographer and is a reconstruction, usually, of the narration by the interviewee. This informs the position of post-modern and reflexive ethnographers that there is an autobiography in ethnography. It is this interface between the native text and the active psyche of the ethnographer that autoethnography stresses.

On the other hand, autoethnography also emphasizes the inherent ethnography of autobiography. This position addresses the socially situated nature of all knowledge and knowing and the importance of specifying the knower. However, this understanding of the ethnographic nature of autobiography does not retain the independence of autobiography as a form of self-reflexive writing that is primarily concerned with the life story or history of the author. The tilt is still toward ethnography as autobiography is made subject to ethnographic studies. In essence, autoethnography only stresses the inherent autobiographical aspect of ethnography and not the other way round. In this case autobiography is completely eclipsed by ethnography. Autobiography is seen merely as quality that is important only when there is the consideration of the effect of

the experience of field work on the ethnographer and the use of others to learn more about and reflect upon oneself. The emphasis is on self-reflexivity. This interface is illustrated in diagram I below, which obviously dwells on the primacy of ethnography.

Autoethnography

Auto [self-reflexive]

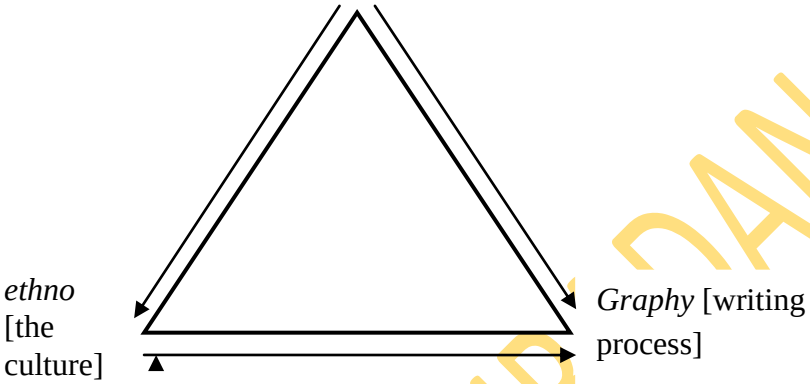

Diagram 1.

In diagram I above, *auto* represents the *self-reflexivity* of the writing*; ethno* represents the *culture* that is written, while *graphy* represents the *writing* itself. The emphasis, therefore, is the self-reflexivity (auto) of the writing (graphy) of culture (ethno); it does not account for the author's life history as is the case in autobiography. Thus, while it underlines the fact that the writing of culture was done by the ethnographer and that the process was influenced by their personality, it does not say that story or culture written is that of the writer. If it accounts for this, it would take care of the *bio*, which is the author's life history. Autoethnography merely establishes the fact that ethnography is written self-reflexively and that ethnography has within it a quality of autobiography. Actually, autoethnography suggests that the story being told is not that of an individual but of a culture and that the writer is an outsider. This inability to address the individual life experience of the author renders autoethnography inadequate to describe the main preoccupation of autobiography, which is the narration of an individual life history (the 'bio'). Because of this gap, the relationship between ethnography and autobiography, as conceptualised by autoethnography, is incomplete. Thus, it becomes necessary to re-conceptualise this relationship and define an appropriate interface between ethnography and autobiography such that neither is eclipsed by the other. Such a concept should be able to account for the inherent quality of autobiography as a culturally constituted self narration.

Ethno-autobiography adequately addresses this as is illustrated in diagram 2

below. While ethno-autobiography properly addresses the fact that it is written self-reflexively by the subject of the life history (as in 'auto'), it equally demonstrates the cultural constitution of the personal life history. Ethno-autobiography is a creative writing of self and culture.

Ethno-autobiography

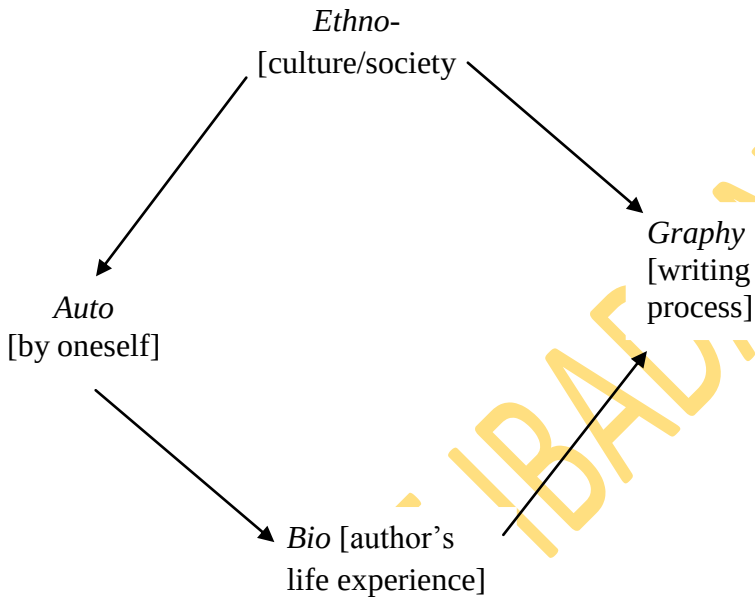

Diagram 2

The *ethno-* which prefixes autobiography in diagram 2 underlines the cultural contexts, the space (s) within which the life that is narrated is situated.

The writing of autobiography is about the construction of identity through creative processes which Tracey (2008) notes "occur in a range of spaces and contexts, from the individual to the cultural and political" (177). Therefore, ethno-autobiography identifies "the educational, psychological, biographical, social and cultural factors that impact on personal creativity" (Tracey 2008: 178). This quality underscores the universality or connectedness of autobiography as a reliable source and means of knowing about social realities and experience. Thus, while autobiography may address the experience of particular individuals, in the process, it communicates universal truths that are very relevant to the experiences of readers. These qualities are also described by Tami Spry (2001) as constitutive of a good and effective Autoethnography. According to Spry, a good and effective Autoethnography should have at least two qualities: First, "as in any evaluation of any literary genre, the writing must be well crafted" and "capable of being respected by critics of literatures as well as by social scientists" (713). Mediocre

writing of whatever form lacks the ability to transform readers and transport them into a place where they are motivated to look back upon their own personal political identity construction. Second, a good autoethnography must be emotionally engaging (see also Behar, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Ronai, 1992), "*as well as* critically self-reflexive of one's sociopolitical interactivity" (Spry 2001: 713). This ability to reflect on the subjective self in context through interactions with others is the unique quality of ethno-autobiography.

Ethno-autobiography challenges the traditional anthropologists' and social scientists' notion that autobiography is too self-indulgent and subjective to be reliable source of social history. Whereas, ethnography, which also suffers the same fate of self-reflexivity and as such subjectivity, is seen as objective and reliable writing of social history. Developments in postmodernism, post-colonialism, and feminism and the growing dialogue across disciplinary boundaries have shown that this notion is problematic. Ethno-autobiography articulates the ways in which autobiographical writings constitute selves and social form culturally. As Reed-Danahay (1997) states, "Ethnic auto/biography, self-reflexivity in ethnography, and native ethnography" have raised many provocative questions about these issues. Therefore, Ethno-autobiography constitutes a form of resistance to hegemonic bodies of discourses and master narratives. Well written autobiographies as well as other forms of self narrative, whatever the genre, offer very interesting and challenging insights into the construction and transformation of identities and cultural meanings (Reed-Danahay, 1997: *the blurb*). This is adequately demonstrated in autobiographies of migrants who are concerned with the negotiation of space, race and culture in the construction and transformations of identity.

Jürgen W. Kremer (2003) described 'ethnoautobiography' as a discourse that exists within various contexts, namely decolonisation, deconstruction of Whiteness, ecology, social world, gender roles, shamanism, and transpersonal psychology. According to Kremer, ethnoautobiography is a visionary and imaginative process that grounds itself in time, place, history, ancestry, and stories of origin and creation (4). As a creative and self-exploratory writing which also includes oral presentation, 'ethnoautobiography',

> grounds itself in the ethnic, cultural, historical, ecological, and gender background of the author. Part of such writing is the investigation of hybridity, categorical borderlands and transgressions, and the multiplicity of (hi)stories carried outside

> and inside the definitions and discourses of the dominant society of a particular place and time. As creative and evocative writing and storytelling, ethnoautobiography explores consciousness as the network of representations held by individuals from a subjective perspective, and brings them into inquiring conversation with objective factors related to identity construction. (Kremer, 2003: 9)

As a post-colonial writing and discourse, ethno-autobiography deconstructs the centres and creates multiple margins. It deconstructs hegemonic and colonising consciousness and master narratives so as to put an end to racialism, and essentialist identity politics. This privileges cultural root and indigenous knowledge and perspective of place by stressing the history of the place. As Kremer further explains, "ethnoautobiography facilitates the demise of narcissistic individualism, the emergent modern norm, and resolutions of antagonistic constructions of individual and community"(3). Within the context of gender roles, ethno-autobiography implies the deconstruction of bipolar categories, which serve the male supremacy (3). As such, ethno-autobiography is a critique of the self, of that which is personal and conceives the construction of the self as a participatory event (Kremer, 2003: 3).

Ethno-autobiography, as used in this study, conceptualises the cultural constitution of autobiography and other autobiographical writings. By virtue of its coordinates: history, myth, place, culture, and identity, it obviously concerns more than the narration of a self as it indicates the interaction of the self with various contexts. It interrogates the episteme and discourses of the dominant society of a particular place and time. According to Kremer, autobiographies and memoirs, for instance, are life stories that may or may not be described as ethno-autobiography, depending on how well-crafted they are, and whether they address the various dimensions of ethno-autobiography. He notes:

> Notions of ethnoautobiography and autoethnography, using these and similar terms have emerged in recent years as part of interdisciplinary courses and classes addressing issues of race, multiculturalism, etc. as well as in the field of literary criticism (9) (see also Shirinian 2001; Ellis and Bochner 2000).

While Kremer described ethno-autobiography as inquiries into roots and origins (2003: 12), it is used in this study as a creative writing, a literary work in the conventions of poetry, and prose. The *ethno-* prefixes autobiography in this term to

underline issues of racism, ethos and space which describe the cultural constitution of autobiography.

2. 8 Ethno-autobiography and migratory experience

One of the basic characteristics of ethno-autobiography is that it involves the negotiation of borders and boundaries like that between the public and the private. It concerns the question of identity. The issue of multiple and shifting identities is a very current one in cultural studies, literary criticism, and postcolonial studies, though the notion is not a new one. For instance, it has been reflected in W. E. B Du Bois's articulation of the idea of "double consciousness", an idea that is associated with the late nineteenth-century (Zamir 1995).

There has been a continued negotiation of spaces, be it cultural, narrative or psychic. The reconstruction of the self in relation to others is dialogical and involves movements from one narrative construction to another. As Elazar Barkan and Marie-Denise Shelton (1998) have noted, when an individual is transplanted, they are transformed and the "I" that qualifies the narrative identity is transformed and "is no longer a speaking subject with a clear history and a distinct voice. [Rather it] becomes a composite product of historical antimonies and contradictory impulses" (3). Tami Spry (2001) argues that because of the chaotic nature of human experiences there is need for multiple ways of making sense of it. According to her, self-reflexive narratives like Autoethnography would be useful in this regard as it can "provide a space for the emancipation of the voice and body from homogenizing knowledge production and academic discourses" which would make possible to articulate the "intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity" (727).

Ethno-autobiography is about the construction, negotiation and re-negotiation of social reality, and as Trihn (1991) observes, this reality "involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of borderlines, one that remains multiple in its hyphenation" (107). Migrants' ethno-autobiographies address issues of displacement, place and space and "illustrate why racial identity formation occurs at the intersection of a person's subjective memory of trauma and collective remembrance of histories of domination."(Kenneth Mostern, 2004:31). According to Reed-Danahay (1997: 4),

> This phenomenon of displacement – so linked to issues of rapid sociocultural change, of globalization and transculturation, as well as to the extremes of violence occurring in many parts of the world – breaks down dualisms of identity and insider / outsider status; [...] the ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life is related to the ability to write or do autoethnography [...] It involves a rewriting of the self and the social. (4)

Transnational migration which has been linked to 'the transformation of capitalism" (Wilson-Tagoe 2006: 95) has redefined social structures and relational patterns. It has completely changed the way the self is perceived and understood. Adesina and Adebayo (2009: 2) note that, the process of globalisation has intensified in recent times. This has not only changed the very nature of our world but has also created "cultural and social processes that transcend boundaries." This condition creates interdependence and interconnectedness among peoples and nations, which according to Nnamani (2003: 38), is increasingly eroding old feelings and distinct comprehension of people's worldview.

Globalisation has been described in relation to two notions and from two historical positions: the notion of globalization as an imperialist agenda, a capitalist system with its concepts of modernisation and civilization; and the notion of globalisation as a process linked to the transformation of capitalism, which has its consequences on culture, nationality, and socio-political relations (Wilson-Tagoe 2006: 94-95). According to Wilson-Tagoe, globalisation is an issue that concerns economic and social theory:

> […] it is deployed in different ways in economic and social theory. But whether it is seen in materialist terms as the transformation of capital or in culturalist terms as the globalization of culture, the common understanding is that the process radicalizes notions of nation and culture as they were conceptualized in models of modernization and in post-colonial visions of national communities (2006: 95).

It has been argued that contemporary form of globalisation is the result of a global economic system that is pivoted in Europe and the United States. This economic system "disorganized capitalism" and creates a universalist and internationalist cultural space, which is supposed to be autonomous of national boundaries, histories, and cultural groups (Wilson-Tagoe, 2006: 95). According to Mike Featherstone (1999), this notion of globalisation and its distinctive forms of social life task the focus of sociology on the society, which is defined as exclusively a bounded nation state. Appadurai (1999)

observed that the global culture that emerges from this space, which is described by Wilson-Tagoe (2006: 94) as a "third culture," is fluid and heavily inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different actors: nation-states, multinationals, and Diaspora communities. Thus, globalisation is described as "[…] a process marked by instability and disjuncture" such that "the disorienting and illusionary lives of migrants may enact this disjunctive yet at the same time provide spaces for re-thinking nation, location and identity." (Wilson-Tagoe, 2006: 99).

Postcolonial discourse and reading of contemporary and historical texts are influenced by these configurations of social structures and are done across disparate geographic and temporal spaces. In the context of globalisation and neo-imperialisms, unequal development, political instability, violence and gender inequality continue to shape complex postcolonial realities and nation and narration, place and displacement. As such, location and migration remain major paradigms of postcolonial critique. These are reflected in the postcolonial lexicon and the representations of contemporary experiences, which clearly indicate preoccupations with placement, movement and interconnection. Contemporary realities over the last few decades have arguably changed our understanding of what constitutes a specific location and this requires reading practices which reflect the communicative, political and aesthetic concerns of trans-national and trans-cultural representations. The growing body of texts which linguistically, aesthetically, and thematically draw on and combine distinct repertoires and reflect the communicative, political and aesthetic concerns of translocation are indications of this development and underscore the need for the study of translocation activities. In this context, Ethno-autobiography serves as a "vehicle of emancipation", which encourages the individual to dialogically look back upon one's self as other, thereby generating critical agency in the stories of one's life "as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate, and embrace" (Tami Spry, 2001: 708). Mile (2004) describes trans-nationalism as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Miles, 2004: 8). According to her,

> […] transnational migration implies that migrants do not just cross one social setting to go to another: the very process of crossing borders creates new social and cultural patterns, ideas, and behaviors. Transnational migrants not only grapple with making sense of a different place but can also transform both the place and themselves through their actions. The term "transnationalism" draws attention to the connections between people and places—connections that extend well beyond obvious national borders… (8)

Obododimma Oha (2009) argues that trans-cultural encounters are transgressive, which necessitates interrogation of relationships and feature reconstruction of reality and an invention or re-invention of self and identity:

> […] it violates cultural boundaries, and creates a dialogism that challenges cultural hegemony. The return to African roots in the writings of Africans who have migrated to the West clearly represents the notion of "mo(ve)ment of transgression," not only in terms of crossing cultural borders and seeking to reinvent the past that was left behind, but also in terms of the implied challenge and interrogation of the hegemonic Western value-system(182).

Adesina and Adebayo (2009) describe trans-nationalism as more than mere border crossing. They argue that border is not only physical but could be interpersonal, or psychological. According to them, border "consists of the limits set by a society which often contribute to the total make up of a people's identity" (4). Globalization brings about migration of labour which enhances internationalisation and forms a crucial factor in contemporary debates on identity. It [re]defines people's loyalties and identification with national spaces, which also results in the development of new solidarities that are beyond the borders of nation and ethnicity; it problematizes the notion of the nation as the primary basis of identity formation. For migrants, Singer (2002) noted that "globalization has opened their horizons and migration has become a critical means to an end" (Adesina and Adebayo 2009: 5). Ordinarily, migration is as a constant human experience although its causes and manner vary across history (Susan Arndt and Marek Spitczok Von Brisinski, 2006:43-44). However, the twentieth century has been described as a century of migrations and mass displacements due to wars, political and social insecurity and economic failures among others.

Migration is a collective term for all kinds of human movement whether it is voluntary or forced (Arndt and Von Brisinski, 2006: 44) According to Susan Arndt (2006), the use of the term 'migration' "seems to define a fixed abode as the general norm and a sense of locality as an accepted standard"(44). It is essentially hierarchical, but not an inevitably irreversible process. As she further observes:

> The term "migration" tends to harmonise and disguise hierarchies in as far as it may be and is applied to wholly different processes without critical reflection or specific clarification…. So as not to water down and ultimately also not to politically play down these different processes, migration can be classified according to different criteria. The different division into immigration, emigration and intranational migration, which considers space and the direction of migration, can be further classified by considering aspects such as duration, causes, motives and purposes. (44)

Moreover, migration has been categorized by its motivation. Thus, migration which is motivated by economic and work or social reasons can be differentiated from the one motivated by religious-philosophical and political reasons, which might be caused by dictatorship, racism and/or gender-specific discrimination (Arndt, 2006: 44).

Modern transnational migration has changed the dynamics of relationship and created social cultural spaces which are defined by various values and ideologies. It has also produced various nomenclatures such as Diaspora, exile, refugees, and expatriates, which signify relational dynamics, communities and instruments of identity formations. These designations have been suggested to have different meanings though interrelated and in deferent degrees have become very important terms in cultural research. For instance, Susan Arndt (2006) draws attention to the interrelatedness and differences in the semantic imports of the terms "Diaspora", "migration" and "exile". According to her, despite the overlaps of the denotation of these three terms, they "grant a different value to the individual semantic constituents" and, "each term also transports denotations that it does not share with the others", especially as these terms are used (42).

Etymologically, the term "Diaspora" is linked to the idea of scattering (from the Greek: *disperien =-sperien* [to sow or scatter seeds] and dia [across]). In ancient Greece the idea of scattering was based on colonial expansion and, therefore, had positive connotations. In this case the province outside the Hellenic cities constituted the Greek Diaspora. However, in the Jewish understanding of "Diaspora", the term experiences a change following the destruction of the Holy Temple and the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine which resulted in their being scattered all over the world (Arndt, 2006: 42) From these historical descriptions of the term, there was a transformation from voluntariness to enforcement, thereby signifying obligation and a trauma. As Arndt explains,

> Diaspora is originally a religious term, exile a term with primarily political denotations and migration basically a sociological one. Conceptual overlaps can be seen in the fact that all these terms are based on a transnational crossing of borders by *people* […], thus referring to experiences of displacement and alienation, loss and new beginnings, pain and longing, memory and (dis)identification.' (42)

Apart from its link with the notion of scattering, the term Diaspora also stemmed from the experience of movement and arrival as a transnational collective experience.

This seems to imply an impossibility or as Cohen puts it, a "taboo on return", which postpones the idea or possibility of a return into the distant future and, therefore, necessitates the establishment of a home away from home. In other words,

> The notion of both leaving and returning (often implying a permanent or at least long-term stay in the land of residence) is shared by the terms "diaspora" and "migration". The latter stems from the Latin *migrare* [to wander, to move away] and prominently focuses on the connotation of emigration or moving somewhere else. (Arndt, 2006: 42)

For example, the term "African Diaspora" has been described in reference to the semantics of Jewish Diaspora, as traumatic expulsion and scattering and the related expectation of a return to the Promised Land. In order to distinguish the two waves of African migration and Diaspora – the Diaspora formed as a result of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and that which occurs as a consequence of postcolonial migratory movements – Isidore Okpewho (2009:5) has described these forms of Diaspora as "the precolonial and postcolonial Diaspora". Ali Mazrui (1996) has, however, described them respectively as the "Diaspora of enslavement" and the "Diaspora of imperialism". According to Okpewho, Africans of the pre-colonial Diaspora were forcefully moved out of their societies into bondage without any choice in their relocation to Europe and America while the second wave of migration and Diaspora can be blamed on the postcolonial condition. This postcolonial condition which has been described as "the state of disequilibrium in African societies" was brought about by the intervention of European colonization (Okpewho 2009:6). This condition has created instability, uncommitted leadership, social disorder and consequently insecurity in form of war, economic failure, etc which have resulted in mass migration to the North. The *New York Times* of February 21, 2005 reported this mass exodus of Africans to Europe and America as follow:

> Since 1990, according to immigration figures, more [Africans] have arrived voluntarily than the total who disembarked in chains before the United States outlawed international slave trafficking in 1807 (Okpewho, 2009:7).

In a similar manner and in an attempt to theoretically and methodologically handle the extended signification of the term 'Diaspora', Robin Cohen (1997) classified modern Diasporas into five: (1) *victim Diaspora* (which explains the Diasporic experiences of groups such as Jewish Diaspora, African Diaspora, and Armenian Diaspora), (2) *labor Diaspora* (which is represented by the Indian indentured labourers),

(3) *trade Diaspora* (which includes the Lebanese and Chinese commercial networks), *cultural Diaspora* (represented in the Caribbean history of migration) and (4) *imperial Diaspora* (which is represented in the use of the term in historical analogy to the original Greek use of the word to the conception of the Empire) (49). These classifications have, however, been criticised for their observed inability to handle the complexity and dynamism of modern Diasporic experience. According to Arndt (2006),

> […] the above discussed paradigm change within the history of African migration to the Americas and Europe ultimately suggests that "African diasporas" are not just to be classified as "victim diasporas" formed by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. On the one hand, the term "victim diaspora" is to be read as comprising new geopolitical dimensions. On the other hand, African diaspora also seems to contain characteristics of both "labour diaspora" and a "cultural diaspora" (50).

In another dimension, Cohen (1997: 26), perhaps to argue that not all migratory situations can be termed Diaspora, further characterises Diaspora by nine basic features:

1. Diaspora from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions
2. Alternatively, the [voluntary] expansion from a homeland…;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland…;
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance…, even to its creation;
5. The development of a return movement…;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. A sense of empathy with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement, and;
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Again, this characterisation of Diaspora has been seen as possibly inadequate for describing the totality of the complexities and dynamics of diasporas, including "internal heterogeneities and existing interfaces" (Arndt 2006, p. 50). However, it has been acknowledged for attributing importance of place to the idea of "home" and the social condition of Diaspora as a space. The extension of the meaning ascribed to the term 'Diaspora' has made possible the multiplicity of Diasporas. According to Braziel et al., beyond the traditional usage,

> The term "diaspora" has been increasingly used…to describe the mass migrations and displacements of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in reference to independence movements in formerly colonized areas, waves of refugees fleeing war-torn states, and fluxes of economic migration in post-World War II era (Cited in Arndt, 2006: 49)

Tejumola Olaniyan (2003) differentiates exile from Diaspora by arguing that Diaspora evokes a mass movement of people from one cultural space to another while exile suggests a situational alienation from one's homeland. According to him, Diaspora implies what "large-scale dispersal into a boundless space is to the age of the global what exile, with its intimation of alienation from a national homeland, is to the age of the nation-state." (2). Therefore, from Olaniyan's view, it is the frequency and scale of exile that produces Diaspora. He further differentiates the two terms, as they are used today and explains that 'Diaspora', unlike 'exile' does not address the causes of migration as it is used in "contemporary immigration studies"; it instead underplays the agony attached (Olaniyan, 2003: 2). He also discusses the relationship between exile and emigration. According to him, exile or emigration has been described in two forms: voluntary and involuntary. The involuntary exiles are described as those who were forced out of their homeland through persecution by the state or those haunted for political reasons. But he then submits that whether exile or emigration is voluntary or involuntary, "it seems to me that what exile inscribes, among other things, is the limit of nation-state as we currently have it" (1). He further observes:

> Exile, a kind of opting out or forcing out, reveals incommensurabilities of interests, hopes and aspiration between individuals and the nation-state, incommensurabilities that the state always denote as crises because its ruling idea of the nation is that it is based on a "deep horizontal comradeship", as Benedict Anderson would say, of homogenous yearnings. Exile thus put a perpetual question mark on the nation-state and its idea by revealing its jagged edges and bursting seams that cannot be disciplined into conformity. (1)

According to Susan Arndt (2006) the term "exile", which is etymologically bound to Latin: "*exul, exsul"* (implying staying away from home, banned), however, seems not only to be determined by implying a reason for the migratory movement. Rather, it appears that exile presents itself as a purely individual experience, a "solitude experience outside the group", which differentiates it from migration, which can be experienced collectively or individually and from Diaspora, which by definition is a

collective and transnational experience. However, like exile, "migration can be read as a political act which takes place in a (geo) political context" (Arndt, 2006: 43). As Arndt further explains,

> While the term "migration" seems to partially transport the notion of voluntariness or choice, "exile" focuses on the aspect of political force, and in this sense also functions as a term of political self-location. Thereby it has experienced a semantic extension in as far as ultimately it seems to comprise each form of existentially necessary escape. In this respect, the temporality of the stay in the foreign land and the wish to return to the mother country seems to be–in contrast to diaspora and migration – inherent in the term exile.' (Susan Arndt 2006: 43)

Somehow, the term 'exile' combines the semantic import of both "migration" and Diaspora, by describing both as a process of movement (i.e. to migrate/to go into exile), and also (in the case of Diaspora) the results of this process. Thus, it suggests the person in exile, the span of time in exile, as well as the very state of exile. Since exile can also be read as a reference to a location (as in 'to live in exile'), it is close in meaning to Diaspora. Arndt clarifies this: "one lives in exile or in the diaspora, or in exile in the diaspora; even living in exile within the diaspora is possible" (Susan Arndt 2006: 43).

However, James Clifford (1994) and Wumi Raji (2006) addressed the idea of the centrality of the return to the homeland in their explanation of exile and Diaspora, describing it as merely fictional. Wumi Raji described the connection of the African Diaspora to African homeland (as it concerns the case of the slaves shipped to the Americas) as imaginary. According to him, African "homelands" to them are merely imagined communities. Clifford, on the other hand believes that attentions should be focused on the complex conditions within the diasporic space and the relationship of the Diaspora to the host nation. He argues that realities in most host nations of the Diaspora reveal cases of discrimination of all sorts, and marginalization which render the diasporic communities as "island societies" (Arndt 2006: 51). To Stuart Hall (1990), this condition usually heightens the need for negotiation of identity:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But […] [f]ar from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power. […] [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Arndt 2006: 51).

According to Elazar and Shelton (1998), the representation of exile and Diaspora may depend on the diasporic space. For instance, they argue that in the socio-economic matrix of the United States, the experience of exile and Diaspora is lived differently and cannot be generalised: **"**If for European Jews, immigration meant new opportunities, for the African, diasporic life in the United States has historically been characterized by limitations and disenfranchisement" (8). Therefore, they argue that within the context of modern experience the absence of the homeland as manifested through language and evident as imitation "is placed at the core of the modernist, postmodernist dilemma" (8). They thus argue:

> The modernist project of self-construction is a performance that takes divers forms. It is certainly marked by the desire to return to the rhythms of a lived, historical past. [And] The tension of reconciliation, of building anew in the midst of death, of diaspora as a model morbid industry, is the very experience that permeates the postcolonial world. (9).

In this context, therefore, it is only expected that Diasporas, borders, and exiles will increase their impact on the contemporary imagination as individuals and communities with multiple identities. This is expected to emphasise the continuous search for absent homes that exist only in the search itself. Thus, whether it is an imaginary configuration or not, the notion is that contemporary condition of cross-cultural relations seems to make an absolute detachment from the homeland impossible. In a sense, the idea of Diaspora is possible because there is or was a homeland somewhere left behind in the process of migration. Whether the subject truly connects with this homeland is another issue. In fact, the Diaspora identity will be null without the existence of a homeland from which the Diaspora disconnected. The conception of this homeland may, however, vary. As bell hooks (1989) observes:

> The very meaning of "home" changes with the experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting (19).

Perhaps the idea of death of nation and possibility of a disregard for the homeland may be possible if the world is a little better than it is. That is, a world other than where inequality, marginalisation, and oppression create and maintain a great

divide between the "First World" and the "Third World" and where there are no race, class, gender, and ethnic differences. As Elazar and Shelton (1998) ask, is it possible to

> **[…]** demarcate in a contemporary cultural system an outside space that will aim at recovering affinities but not be subjugated to exclusiveness, or othering? Understandably such a space would become attractive, opening the possibility for 'transnational connections' that link diasporas but 'need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland' (4)**.**

Only if this is possible can the notion of nationality or homeland be overlooked completely. As it were, the desire for a neutral space unattached to any homeland or past is just an illusion, a dream made impossible by the inequality and neo-colonial hegemonies that rule the so-called postmodern world.

Odile Ferly, (2001), nevertheless, contests the binaries between the voluntariness or involuntariness of exile and the argument that this factor distinguishes it from Diaspora. According to Ferly, the argument that that the terms 'exile' and 'diaspora' are commonly restricted to cases of enforced individual or collective emigration, usually for the fear of political persecution, is problematic. She argues that to designate those leaving their country for economic or other reasons as 'emigrants', and not as exiles or Diaspora can be misleading. She observes that the borderline between economic and political emigration is often blurred, since economic hardship usually increases for the poor under oppressive regimes and that "for many people the economic motives for emigration can be just as pressing as political ones: it could be a matter of survival." (1) She argues further:

> There is also a semantic dimension in support of a broader acceptation of the terms 'exile' and 'diaspora'. Unlike the word emigration, they connote some nostalgia for the homeland, heightened by the impossibility of return. All these motives call for a redefinition of these terms and their extension to all cases of *enforced* emigration, whether grounded in political, economic, or social factors. (1- 2)

What appears common to exile and Diaspora and that differentiates them from emigration, according to Odile Ferly, is the attachment to the homeland, which can be experienced both in the cases of exile and Diaspora. Odile also argued that reactions to these conditions may vary on the basis of gender but that both necessitate some cultural adjustment, an adaptation process that leads to a redefinition of identity (2001: 6). As Edward Said observes, exile is different from a long-lasting immigration. Rather, it is a "form of being" which lacks "permanency". He describes exile as a continual battle with

the homeland from where one comes and with new home that has been chosen. According to Edward Said (2000),

> The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, home is always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (185)

From the foregoing, it appears clear that these terms and concepts can be differentiated while at the same time their interconnections can be stressed. As Edward Said further notes, although everyone who is prevented from returning home can be described as an exile, exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés can be distinguished (2000: 181). He then differentiated between those he termed "earlier exiles" and those of our own time. According to Said, the difference is the scale. He describes the twentieth century, for instance, "with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers" as the age of the "refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (174). While expatriates partake in the solitude and estrangement that characterise the condition of "political exile", their presence in the alien country is basically by choice. When this is considered in the context of historical development and changes as in the colonial and post-colonial contexts, however, the categorization of migratory movements may appear a little bit complex.

Nuruddin Farah described exile as cultural and symbolised in the question of language. According to him, this form of exile was occasioned by the imperial encounter. Therefore, he argued that born in "the oral tradition", the move "from oral tradition to a written tradition is itself one form of exile" (Cited in Olaniyan 2003: 2). This view was buttressed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Moving the Centre* (1993):

> But there is another sense [apart from physical exile], a larger sense, in which we can talk of exile in African literature. The writers who emerged after the Second World War were nearly all the products of universities at home and abroad. Some of these universities like Ibadan in Nigeria, Makerere in Uganda, Achimota in Ghana had been set up to manufacture an elite that could make a good partnership with the British ruling circles. The curricula reflected little or nothing of the local surroundings[…]. Writers were part of the educated elite, and there was no way they could escape these contradictions. For instance, they nearly all opted for the European languages as the means of creative output. Thus English, French, and Portuguese became the languages of the new African literature. But these languages were spoken by only about 5 percent of the population. The African Prometheus

> had been sent to wrest fire from the gods, but instead became a captive contented with warming himself at the fire side of the gods. Otherwise he carried the fire in containers that were completely sealed and for which the majority had no key. For whom were they writing? (106-107).

The question of language is very central in post-colonial African literature and has problematised the postcolony's engagement of the question of identity. The fact that most African writers write in foreign languages is a form of exile. It raises question of who the audience of the literature is. Houston Baker (1998) noted that "language exemplifies the cultural process in such a pure form, many anthropologists use language as a theoretical model for the study of culture generally" (xiii). In *The African Imagination* (2001) Abiola Irele addresses the implication of these conditions. According to him, the colonial experience and the attendant social and cultural ruptures have problematised the African imagination thereby creating a crisis of memory and identity and ambivalence in their relation to the African history and culture. In most cases African writers write about Africa as an outsider because such a writer is alienated from the African consciousness either because of the condition of internal exile – socially, politically and economically- or as a result of physical distance caused by migration and the consequent cultural displacement. This invariably creates double consciousness and a problematic understanding of the Africa imagination. According to Abiola Irele,

> The double relation of modern African writers represents something of a dilemma, which stems from the apparent disjunction that separates their creative activity and effort from their material and language, between what is given as *signified* and the constraints of the *signifier* [...] Formulated differently, the problem of the African writer employing a European language is *how to write an oral culture*. (16)

Andrew Gurr (1981) addressed this condition of exile when he argued that exile could take many forms. It could be in the form of social and political alienation; it could also take the form of language use in which the medium of communication becomes a barrier for social, political and economic participation. According to Gurr, "there is the Russian concept of the internal émigré, the alienated artist self-exiled even while still living within his own society […] –almost all modern African writers if we count writing in the colonialists' language as a mark of exile -…" (11). Therefore, the question of language appears to be an integral part of literature in the context of migration and

exile. Nelson Fashina (1992) describes this as "linguistic expatriation". He notes that this is "a central problem" in modern African literature (7) and is the consequence of the "incursion of and occupation of Africa by European powers" (7). This seems particularly true of the literature of African migrants and exiles because of the colonial background. Arndt (2006:56) observes that it is not only humans that cross borders; "borders also cross over languages, and this process assumed in Africa – as a result of colonial demarcations – vast proportions and dimensions unheard of before." This condition has been termed as "Exography" which implies writing in "anOther language" and "has turned out to be a political concept bound to the rejection of writing in a language of the former powers" (Arndt 2006: 57-58).

The experience of exile is not defined only by migration but also by alienation and cultural disconnection. In other words, exile could be either internal or external. Both forms of exile and displacement are caused by social and political alienation and disenfranchisement among other factors. Thus exile can either be intra-continental, intercontinental and even there can be internal exile in one's own country. Though much of modern African literature deals with the condition of exile one way or the other, especially as it concerns the experience of colonisation, some of these works address internal exile. Internal exile is occasioned by alienation which may result from persecution of writers by neo-colonial leaders and dictators or mass displacement caused by wars, political persecution, and economic woes, which have plagued the African continent for more than three decades. Internal exile is a psychological state of disconnection and alienation from the social life of a community even while living within such community. Mandla Langa describes the psyche of the internal exile in *The Naked Song* when he observes that the condition of exile is not only geographical but also psychic:

> Exile was not so much a geographical dislocation as a state of mind, something that consumed and branded and left one marked for life. Many, like animals whose limbs were left in a snare, walked through life crippled, their minds locked on that fateful moment of rupture (Cited in Jones, 2000: viii).

In a series of rhetorical questions Jacques Mounier (1986), in his introductory essay to *Exile et Litterature,* catalogues the multiple forms of exile which include the geographical, "interior" or psychological, linguistic/language and cultural exiles:

> Could one not distinguish between different exiles? Can we speak on the one hand, of external (exterior) exiles and of interior exiles on the other? If exile is usually physical, that is to say spatial, geographical, doesn't there also exist a cultural exile, an exile in the culture in the language or languages of the other? Thus [exile

> can be experienced] not only through rejection or banishment and chastisement but also by incomprehension and alienation or lost identity. (Cited in Aderemi Bamikunle, 1996: 73)

Disenchantment caused by political and social alienation and economic hardship have increased the migration of African intellectuals and writers and other economic refugees to Europe and America in search of social and economic security and political asylum. This has created in African countries what has been described as epidemic of "brain drain". While explaining how internal exile could be worse, Wole Soyinka described these emigrants as "lucky drainees". According to him, their "stay-at-home colleagues" endure a more disorienting and gruesome condition as their brains "will be found as grisly sediments on the riverbed of the Nile. Or in the stomach linings of African crocodiles and vultures" (Cited in Tejumola Olaniyan, 2003:1). Olaniyan describes this properly:

> Physical distance from home and its commonly associated feelings of being victimized, of bitterness, sorrow, loneliness, dejection not to say depression, nostalgia, and the likes, may be painful and distressing, but being at home is often not any less so. (1).

Historically in Africa, remaining in homeland has proved to be as good as death in two ways: physical death of writers and political critics by oppressive and persecuting government institutions. An example of this is the case of the Nigerian writer, environmentalist, activist and social critic, Ken Saro Wiwa, who refused to go into exile and was murdered by the military regime of the Nigerian dictator, General Sani Abacha. Metaphorically, it is a form of living death for writers and intellectuals who become unproductive because of unfavourable conditions at home. The Somalian writer, Nuruddin Farah, who left home in the 1970s and has not returned 'home' because there is no country to return to, is a good example. According to him, exile "could even be made profitable" since distance from "home" does not necessary kill creativity. Instead, he confesses that for him, "distance distills; ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing" (Cited in Olaniyan 2003: 1).

That migration of African writers and intellectuals is partly caused by the condition of internal exile is buttressed by Susan Arndst et. al (2006). They argue that the immediate causes of cultural shift and ambivalence and the current waves of migration of Africans to the West are attributable to the unhealthy condition of African States. She particularly connects it to religion, economic and political conditions of these countries (48). Therefore, according to Richard K. Prieb, African writers make up

arguably "the most transcultural and transnational group of individuals anywhere in the world." They have become intricate part of the modern worldwide migration and globalisation with all its attendant implications: physical, socio-cultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation which are evident in the "cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form" of their literary production (Ojaide 2008: 1). Writers such as Peter Abrahams, Dennis Brutus, Chinua Achebe, Kofi Anyidoho, Ayi Kwei Armah, Kofi Awoonor, Biyi Bandele-Thomas, Francis Bebey, Calixthe Beyala, Bessie Head, Alex LaGuma, Danbudzo Marechera, Ben Okri, Kole Omotoso, Sola Osofisan, Okot p'Bitek, and many others have at one time or the other spent some time in exile and many of them are still in exile.

The scale and frequency of transnational migrations especially since the 1990s and the critical discourses associated with this development have generated intellectual debates among scholars as to its long time implications for the issues of nation-state and identity. Olaniyan (2003) wonders if these would not result in the "relativization of the nation-state and consequent souring of nationalist particularism"(1-2). Martin Albrow (1997) argues in *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* that territorial expansion and the sovereignty of reason, and modernity's intrinsic features coupled with the inability of the state "[…] to shape the aspirations of individuals and to gather them into collective political aims" (75-76) have undermined the idea of nation-state and resulted in a global system and order which, according to him, "[…] involves a relativization and destabilization of old identities" and "the creation of new hybrid entities, transnational phenomena like diasporic communities" (93-94). Cosmopolitan critics like Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Homi K. Bhabha, in obvious opposition to the nationalist response to globalization and its attendant identity crisis celebrate universalist tendencies, which seek to neutralize borders and national boundary. Even Edward Said voiced this sentiment in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Explaining Said's attitude towards this issue, Afam Akeh (2006:7) observed that Said's public lectures indicate his attempts to justify "his difficulties with nationalists and nation-projects". He quotes Said:

> Because the world has become far more integrated and demographically mixed than ever before, the whole concept of national identity has to be revised and, in most places that I know, is in the process of being revised. Muslims from North Africa, Kurds, Turks and Arabs from the Middle East, West and East Indians, as well as men and women from several African countries have changed forever the collective face of Britain, Sweden,

> France, Germany, Italy and Spain, among other countries in Europe. Extraordinary mixtures of nationalities, races and religions form the different histories of Latin America, and when we look at India, Malaysia… and several more Asian countries, we will note, as we would in the case of many African countries, an enormous variety of languages and cultures…The point is that of all the baggage inherited from nineteenth century political thought, it is the notion of a unified, coherent, homogenous national identity that is now undergoing the most rethinking, and this change is being felt in every sphere of society and politics (7).

However, this dream of a unified and stateless space is at best a utopia, a creation of exilic psyche traumatized by the overwhelming condition of exile and the need or desire for survival and integration. That migration of any form usually produces transgressions, resistance, negotiation, rationalisation, and anxiety about survival makes such a vision a mirage in the desert experience of exile. As Toyin Falola, Niyi Afolabi and Aderonke A. Adesanya (2008b) note:

> Displacement in the era of transatlantic slavery, for example, produced the migration of African deities as a transnational force of cultural and religious survival in the Americas. The aftermaths of these forced migrations are the survival of artistry, and music. Even in cases of voluntary migration or refugee migration and their attendant adjustment challenges, African migrants found creative ways to adapt through religious solace and reinvention of identities in the form of syncretism, trans-culturation, and hybridity. (4)

Reactions of African writers and other migrants to the conditions of exile and Diaspora indicate concerns other than a universalist sentiment. As Afam Akeh (2006) agues, it is possible that an exile writer who has identity problem would want to seek integration into and acceptance by the host country through adopting the lifestyles of the host and by writing in ways acceptable to them and creating a picture elicited by the cosmopolitan critics. But the realistic responses of these writers to the condition of exile and Diaspora are different. According to Akeh, there are lots of sentiments and concerns of subjects that are not stated. There are secret, unexpressed pains and nostalgia that are bellied by the struggles that living in exile or Diaspora requires. These underlying sentiments rather than indicating a detachment from a national root reinforces it. This is especially so when such ideal of nationality goes beyond the modern idea of the nation-state (2006: 7-8). This is essentially the problem of migratory experiences. Therefore, despite the discontent that the condition of exile engenders, African migrants have continued to devise various ways of survival while secretly keeping the hope of an

eventual return alive. Whether this hope is realizable is another issue. Meanwhile, the growing disenchantment with political and economic life within many African countries keep the lures of the West alive, though, as Toyin Falola, et al. (2008) argue:

> The pleasures of the West, like those of exile, are often outweighed by discomforts while trying to make sense of senselessness and give meaning, in myriad of manners, to meaninglessness as well as the double jeopardy that characterizes the African restless mind. The metaphoric "greener pastures" come with unquantifiable sacrifices, so that what now seems green may sometimes appear red, yellow, or even gray, depending on the state of mind (483).

This echoes Chinua Achebe's observations in *Home and Exile* (2000: 92-93) that the experience of Africans that sojourn in countries of the West will always be characterised by marginalisation and inequality. Chinua Achebe has been living in the West for decades and so talked from experience (he died recently in exile). Also in response to an opinion by Salman Rushdie that "Literature has little to do with a writer's home address," Afam Akeh (2006:1) quoted Achebe as saying:

> I just wonder if in seeking to free the writer from all ties we might not end up constraining literature's long reach into every nook and corner of every writer's experience and imagining including his encounter with the extraordinary invention called the passport (*Home and Exile*, 2000: 105).

The fact is that individual migrants and particularly writers are responding to their own conditions as dictated by their particular experiences. The result of these adaptations is the focus of many recent studies of literary critics and students of African literature (Ojaide 2008: 1). Nigerian migrant and travel ethno-autobiographical poetry articulates these complex experiences. This writing is similar to what Hearn (2006) describes as "narrative identity". According to Hearn, 'narrative identity' is

> The process by which individuals construct a personal identity and a relationship with the culture they inhabit […] The formation of personal and social identity is a time-based, historical process, an unceasing dialogue of the self and the social [which] captures the insecurity of and ambivalence of human behaviour, by reflecting in the assembly of fragmentary artifacts the difficulty of communicating one's needs and managing relationships with others (112-113).

All the contradictions and struggles that exist in the contemporary world reveal the enormous challenges that transnational relation and the realities of the ever present binaries of self and others pose to modern existence. As Pius Adesanmi (2004:53) notes,

they are results of "the new modalities of being in an increasingly internationalized time-space." According to him, much of postmodern and postcolonial thinking in the past twenty years has assisted in the consolidation of the belief that the world has become largely multicultural, transnational and globalised with an increasingly less patriarchal space. He argues that within this space, "boundaries are theorized as rapidly collapsing, staples of identity are constructed as fluid, and constantly shifting, as opposed to the assumed stabilities of an immediate past" (53). He, however, doubts the viability of this kind of theorisation. He is particularly of the opinion that the practice of globalisation does not seem to take into consideration spatial and historical contexts thereby demonising race and colour "beyond redemption as a category of cultural analysis" (53). He believes that too much emphasis has been placed on economics while deemphasizing what he describes as "the spatiochromatic understanding of the phenomenon" (53). He, therefore, cautions:

> […] the complex intermeshing of race, space, geography, and the identitarian sensibilities of the contemporary subaltern subject is a certain pointer to the fact that some of the categories of cultural discourse and theory with which we apprehend the world may be prematurely celebratory (53).

While many people believes that globalisation will ensure a united and egalitarian society perhaps because of the idea of plurality and internationalisation of culture and economies, the reality is different. Because globalization brings about plurality, it also encourages ethnic identity which is the opposite of touted unity. As long as the problems of racism, national boundaries and the existence of nation-states remain, international and trans-cultural relation would remain a merely economic and for the satisfaction of each player's interests. The world is defined by diversity and ethnic loyalty even where there is trans-cultural relation; everyone negotiates his or her space and defines it according to individual needs and experience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

Literary and cultural studies are humanistic studies. Traditionally, research in the humanities employs methods and activities that are characterised by critical or (sometime) scientific inquiry which are mostly through reading, writing and reflection. This is also described as ethnographic research. Essentially, research in the humanities involves the study of life and culture through the exploration and analysis of aspects of culture such as words, ideas, narratives and the art and artefacts. The objective of these studies is to understand life and its meaning. These are the concerns of literary and cultural studies which involve close reading and interpretation of literary texts of all genres to tease out aspects of life and culture. Since literature is creative presentation of life and existence, research into it helps us to gain unique insight into life and assists us in making sense of our world and our place in it.

However, contemporary research in the humanities has become increasingly inter-disciplinary, and cross-disciplinary in its approach to knowledge production. As a result of this, the boundary between the humanities and other disciplines (social sciences, science and technology) is fast disappearing. This is because people are now more than ever interested in all issues and a broader understanding of them in order to have a better insight into social reality (Une Flick, Ernest von Kardorff & Ines Steinke, 2004). Even among humanistic disciplines research method is becoming experimental. Literary studies are essentially qualitative. A qualitative research method makes possible expressive and narrative description within a natural setting (Creswell, 1998; Larson, 2009).

3.1 Methodological perspective

This study explores the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry in order to demonstrate that creative autobiographies present a unique blend of self and culture within the context of social history. Through this, it seeks to question the notion among critics that autobiographical writings are essentially subjective and self-aggrandising. This is done by demonstrating

that autobiographies are inherently ethnographic; they are not only historical, they are also critiques and interrogations of grand and master narratives. These features define its quality as a source of social history. The study explores the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel literary ethno-autobiographical poetry in terms of racism, ethos, and space. These cultural aspects are explored in six collections of poems which were purposively selected as follow: four collections of Nigerian migrant autobiographical poems: Tanure Ojaide's *When it No Longer Matters Where You Live*, Femi Oyebode's *Master of the Leopard Hunt,* Olu Oguibe's *Songs of Exile*, Uche Nduka's *The Bremen Poems*, and two collections of poetic travelogues: Odia Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems* and Remi Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America*. These texts were subjected to critical literary analysis.

Postmodern critics such as Clifford Geertz (1983), Mark Neuman (1996), Reed-Danahay (1997) and Leon Anderson (2006) are of the view that all writings of life and culture are self-reflexive and, therefore, subjective. They question the argument of traditional ethnographies, for instance, that ethnographic records and reports are objective and conceptualised self-reflexive constructions of life and culture as autoethnographies.

Scholars such as Kay Warren (1997); Birgitta Svensson (1997); Henk Driessen (1997); Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997); Alexandra Jaffe (1997); and Caroline Brettell (1997) demonstrate that life histories and the need to narrate our own life experiences are qualities of the modern world and existence. Femi Oyebode (2009); C. Oiler (1983); Furman (2006) and Shelley Tracy (2008) also explored the ethnographic quality of poetry. Particularly, Oyebode explored how poetry can help doctors, especially psychiatrists, to understand their patients better. By depicting the cultural constitution of Nigerian migrant and travel literary autobiographical poetry this study seeks to demonstrate that autobiographical writings occur in a range of spaces and contexts, from the individual to the cultural and political.

This study also departs from previous studies of autobiography in Nigeria by selecting poetry as the chosen genre for examination has been described as uncommon (Toyin Falola, 2008; Dasylva and Oriaku, 2010). Apart from Obi Nwakanma's biographical reading of Christopher Okigbo's poetry in *Christopher Okigbo: Thirsting For Sunlight (1930-67)* (2010), there is hardly any serious study of Nigerian biographical or autobiographical poetry.

3.1.1 Methodology: historico-biographical method

Historico-biographical method is adopted in this study. It is a combination of the historical and biographical methods. While historical method allows discussion of past and present events and how they relate, qualitative biographical method concerns the exploration of the complexity of the individual life and the process of creating self images and world images. Qualitative biographical research accepts that the biography of an individual can always be understood as a cultural construct. The main focus of its observation lies in studying individual forms of the processing of social and milieu-specific experience (Dilthey 1968a: 102). Historico-biographical method makes possible the reading of life histories as the construction of self and culture through the interrogation of the past and the present. Autobiography plays on memory and recollections of an act that brings the past into the service of the present. As Dilthey (1968a) observes:

> Every life has its own meaning. It is to be found in a meaning context in which every memorable present has a counter-value, but at the same time, in the context of memory, it has a relation to a meaning of the whole. This meaning of the individual being is completely singular, inseparable from recognition, and yet, in its way, it represents –like Leibniz's monad – the historical universe. (Dilthey 1968c: 199)

The above quotation describes life history as social history. Social history has been described as a form of historiography that shifts emphasis from prominent persons or the elites to the collective past of people of all social levels (Ernst Breisach 1983). It is described as the account of the daily life and struggle of common people against oppression; a kind of counter-narrative written to challenge grand narratives and portray the lives of neglected or silent groups in society. Personal narratives make possible the writing of the history of the lower classes, women, peasants and all the oppressed (the 'Other') whose experiences have often been ignored in official historical documents and master narratives (Chima J. 2006: 248).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Literary genre theory is employed to discuss the conceptualisation of ethno-autobiography as a social category of the genre of autobiography. Genre theory is used to group texts, literary and non-literary, into classes or types and to name those types.

Traditionally, genre theory relates to literature and literary studies dating back to the classical period (Biakolo 1988; Devitt 1996; Chandler 2005; Egwu 2011). The term 'genre' is used in literature to refer to types and classes of literature. Until recently, the genre has been particularly associated with literature and literary studies. Today genre is used across many disciplines, including functional and applied linguistics and is connected with scholars such as Bhatia, Halliday, Kress, Hassan, Swales among others. In communication studies, it is connected with scholars like Chandler, Campbell, Jameson, Yates and others. Bazerman, Berkenkotter, Coe, Devitt, Freedman, Miller, Russel and others employ genre in rhetoric and composition studies. It is used in cultural studies, pedagogy and in other fields (See Hyon 1990; Devitt 1996; Bawarshi 2000; Chandler 2005). In the past two decades, the issues of genre types and function have preoccupied postmodern anthropologists (Clifford Geertz 1980; Mark Neuman 1996; Reed-Danahay 1997; Leon Anderson 2006). The last has debated the issue of objectivity and self reflexivity, and the problem of authenticity. In this study, genre is explored in an interdisciplinary manner to underscore contemporary blurring of the gap and dichotomy between the uses of the term across disciplines. This position is stressed by postmodernist attitude to the construction of realities.

The study adopts historico-biographical method of analysis to explore social poetics and tropes of cultural memory in poetic autobiographies of Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimun, Femi Oyebode, Olu Oguibe, Remi Raji, and Uche Nduka. This method makes possible the examination of how social realities are represented in these poems and how they reveal the construction and transformation of identities and cultural meanings within social milieu, such that life trajectory reveals social constraints.

3.2.1 Literary Genre Theory

At various points since the classical classification of literature into generic categories by Aristotle, discourses on genre theory have been plagued by disinterest, skepticism and uncertainties. These have been more problematic since the beginning of the 19th century (Biakolo, 1987; Stam, 2000; Chandler, 2005) and have been attributed to several factors. For instance, Biakolo (1987) identified three factors as responsible for this, namely the influence of Darwinian notion of biological progress, "which threw ancient assumptions of permanent classes and forms into disrepute"; the modern emphasis on the individuality of creative ability and talent, which was pioneered by the Romantics. According to Biakolo, "this …made literary canons suspect as impediments

to the artists' creative freedom". The third factor is identified as Benedetto Croce's (1866-1952) "idealist aesthetics", which by "identifying intuition and expression […] made the subjective 'possession' of the art object the true aim of the aesthetic response" (1987: 9).

The last position was also stressed by Vivas Eliseo (1968) in a paper he titled "Literary Classes: Some Problems". But according to Fowler (1979: 102), the fact that early critics of genres were "sometime" confused in their attempts to formulate "concepts of mode", as was the case during the Renaissance, "is no reason to doubt the existence of distinctive generic repertoires." Therefore, a new interest in the theory of genre developed in the 1960s, especially with the emergence of Structuralism associated with Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) (Biakolo, 1987: 9). As Biakolo observes,

> The insight into literary building blocks afforded by the semiotic method in language and culture, called for a reformulation of the concept of literary kinds, of their function in the reading enterprise. Thus, an important aspect of literary semiotics has been the identification of the place of genre in interpretive activity, a recognition that is affirmed even by the skepticism of Jacques Derrida (10).

This view was buttressed by Maria Corti (1978) who underscored the importance of inquiries into literary genres and how it would "lead to very distinct conclusions that may be separated into two fundamental categories: those of an abstract, a temporal deductive nature, and those of a historic, diachronic inductive nature" (115). The first approach (the deductive approach) is linked with the classical perspective and is based on rhetorical structures, which concern themes, forms and models. This created "an order of values", which also generated archetype that then "becomes transformed into a practical normative model" (Biakolo, 1987: 11). The second approach, according to Biakolo (1987), concerns two very important issues among others:

> Firstly, it poses the question of generic transformation, and the function of this in literary production and generation. Secondly, it relates genres to a universe of senders and addressees, contributing thereby to our understanding of literary communication, and consequently of the relations between literature and society (11).

The two approaches to the study of genre are germane to the concerns of this study. While the deductive approach addresses the "thematic and formal possibilities" of texts, the inductive approach, which concerns the sociology of literature, addresses the

connection between the form and function of literary creativity; between the text and the context of creative production. Generally, these approaches have as their core an ontological effort to determine the several kinds and forms of literary works.

Literary genre has been described in two ways: as classes and as kinds of literature (Egwu, 2011; Chandler, 2005; Bawarshi, 2000; Harris, 1995; Biakolo, 1987; Fowler, 1971). For instance, Chandler (2005) observers that the word *genre* comes from the French word for 'kind' or class', which itself originated from Latin. According to him, "the term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive *type* of 'text'"(par.1). Citing Robert Allen (1989), Chandler explains:

> For most of its 2,000 years, genre study has been primarily nominological and typical in function. That is to say, it has taken as its principal task the division of the world of literature into types and the naming of those types – much as the botanist divides the realm of flora into varieties of plants (par. 1).

Harris (1995) describes a genre as "a class of like objects or ideas, having several subordinate classes or species" (509). This is in tandem with Derrida and Ronell's (1980) description of genre as "a concept that is essentially classificatory and genealogico-taxonomic" (61). Fowler (1971) argues that "far from being mere classificatory devices […] the traditional genres and modes […] serve primarily to enable the reader to share types of meaning economically" (Cited in Egwu, 2011: 8). According to Fowler, this is so because the reader's "subsequent understanding is also genre-bound" (Egwu, 2011: 8). Therefore, he argues that genre "should be understood as a whole series of form-complexes occurring as elements in a series of finite subsets of works [...] .The literary genre does not define its members, only their forms." (Egwu, 2011: 8).

Classical generic categorisations of literary works did concern the classification into general types. According to Chandler (2005: par. 2), the broadest division of literature "is between poetry, prose, and drama, within which there are further divisions, such as tragedy and comedy within the category of drama." Similarly, Shakespeare, in *Hamlet* (II ii) recognised some classifications of literature as "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral…" (Chandler, 2005: par. 2). As such, there have been various attitudes to generic classification. For instance, some theorists have argued, according to Chandler, that "there are also many genres (Fowler 1989, 216; Wales 1989, 206)" (2005:

par. 3). For example, Carolyn Miller (1984) is of the opinion that "the number of genres in any society […] depends on the complexity and diversity of society" (Cited in Chandler, 2005: par. 3). This view is similar to the functionalist perspective enunciated by Malinowski who amplified the 19th century Taylor and Frazer's position. In the words of Biakolo (1987), this tradition sees genres as "instrumental in the satisfaction of man's changing social and spiritual needs. Since these needs alter in accordance with historical dictates, genres cannot therefore be stable entities"(20). Therefore, Chandler argues that "the classification and hierarchical taxonomy of genres is not a neutral and 'objective' procedure" since there are no undisputed 'maps' of the system of genres within any medium (although literature may be able to lay some claim to a loose consensus) (par. 4). According to Jane Feuer (1992), "a genre is ultimately an abstract conception rather than something that exists empirically in the world" (Chandler, 2005: par. 4). In other words, what a theorist calls genre may be described by another as a sub-genre or even a "super-genre" (Chandler, 2005: par. 4).

There are conventional definitions of genre, which Chandler observes, are based on "the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content (such as themes or settings) and/or form (including structure and style) which are shared by the texts which are regarded as belonging to them" (par. 11). This approach, however, has been described as problematic because, though seen as "theoretically attractive", it "poses many difficulties" (Chandler, 2005: par. 11). Contemporary genre theorists tend to see genres in terms of "family resemblance" among texts. That is, similarities are observed between some texts within a genre (Chandler, 2005: par. 15). But this has been criticised especially by David Lodge, who argued that "no choice of a text for illustrative purposes is innocent" (Chandler, 2005: par. 15). This again brings to the fore Fowler's (1982) view of multiple criteria for describing genres. While he distinguished genres and modes, he identified criteria which Biakolo (1987) has grouped as follow: "representational aspect, external or metrical structure, size or scale, subject, values, mood or attitude, occasion or mise en scene, character, action or style" (22). Thus, according to Biakolo (1987: 22-23),

> Genres may theoretically be formed by individuals by the singular originality of their work. They may also be formed through transformation of existing ones, or by assembling of their repertoires. Roughly, genres possess three stages: primary, secondary and tertiary (for example the epic in Homer, Virgil and Milton); and they die as a result of cultural barrier to their further

> extension, or as a result of cultural changes. At such a state they may become "modulated", that is, continue to survive in a modal condition.

Biakolo describes this modulation as "a state of generic transformation" (23). This change may also be in the form of "change of function in the repertoire or internal embedding" which may cause "generic mixture and hybridization" (23). The possibility of historical transformation of the genre is actually problematic in the sense that it is likely to circumscribe every description of the genre such that "no complete knowledge of them is possible" (Biakolo, 1987: 24) thereby blurring the difference between genres and modes. But Fowler believes that the genre is transformed over time, but retaining features of the past such that "any actual example of the genre is enough to describe it. In Fowler's (1982) words,

> When we design a work to generic type we do not suppose that all its characteristic traits need be shared by every other embodiment of the type. In particular, new works in the genre may contribute additional characteristics. In this way, literary genre changes with time, so that its boundaries cannot be defined by any single set of characteristics such as would determine a class (38).

So far, two clear approaches have been identified in the classification of literary genres: the synchronic deductive approach which describes genres on the basis of "the three modes of imitation, along with their kins [kin] – expressiveness, discourse elements, and son on" and the diachronic approach which is also inductive and "regards the modes not as generic shields but as elemental building blocks, (part fundamental perhaps, but nevertheless still just part) of the constructional process" (Biakolo, 1987: 25). These modes, according to Biakolo, merely constitute the molecular function of the constructional process rather than being the "organon of reportorial elements in genre formation" (25). While the first approach is traced from Aristotle and conceives of genre as class, the second approach is the domain of Alastair Fowler's and Derrida's school, which argues that a work does not need to possess all the characteristics of the particular genre it is associated with. Thus, whereas the synchronic approach emphasizes formal features which are seen as universal and that all literatures are expected to possess, the diachronic approach acknowledges the dynamism of literature and therefore, generic categorisation.

These arguments point in the direction of the blurring of the genre which has characterised postmodern approach to not just literary discourse but also to other areas

of contemporary discourse on culture and life histories. For instance, Clifford Geertz acknowledges the new postmodern attitude to the notion of genre classification. In a paper published in 1980 and entitled "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought", he observed that there is an increasing tendency to mix genres and that this is characteristic of postmodern intellectual life. According to him, there are

> philosophical inquiries looking like literary criticism, scientific discussions looking like belles letters *morceaux*, baroque fantasies presented as deadpan empirical observations, histories that consist of equations and tables […] documentaries that read like true confessions, parables posing as ethnographies, theoretical treaties set out as travelogues, ideological arguments cast as historiographical inquiries (1983:20).

According to him, this has made it very difficult both to situate authors within particular discipline and to classify their works within the confine of a specific genre. This is particularly characteristic of contemporary interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary practices. For example, Caroline Brettell (1997), in a paper entitled "Blurred Genres and Blended Voices: Life History, Biography, Autobiography, and the Auto/Ethnography of Women's Lives" in which she discusses the narration of women's lives, observed that there is a broader context of "reflexivity that has characterized both postmodern and feminist anthropology. According to her, this has resulted in what Barbara Tedlock (1991) has labeled a "growing meta–anthropological literature." (81). She further noted that among other things, feminism and postmodernism have directed our attention to the autobiographical dimension of the anthropological encounter (Moore 1994; Okely and Callaway 1992); to a reconsideration of the contribution of life history to anthropological research (Abu–Lughord 1993; Behar 1990; Cole 1992); to the rising interest in the role of biography in women's history (Alpern et al. 1992) and to an exploration of Autoethnography (Denzin 1989; Hayano 1979; Srathern 1987).This however, is tentative as there is still the desire to maintain the old boundaries of the various genres of life writings. After studying the life narratives of several women, including those of her own mother and hers, and realising that various narrative approaches were used, Brettell concludes:

> If I leave the reader at the close of this volume with a sense of incertitude, it is precisely because the boundaries among the various genres of life-writing and writing about culture are indeed blurred. Paul Kendall (1965) once suggested that any biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it; there are, perhaps, much ethnography that shelter autoethnographies within them (245).

Susan Geiger (1986) underscores the ethnography of self-writing as life history in its usefulness for breaking the silence of women within a patriarchal society. According to her,

> Life histories help us to gain access to the particularities of women's experiences under the changing political, economic, and social conditions of the twentieth century […] . They permit comparative cross-cultural studies of women's responses to such conditions in different settings (Brettell 1997: 227-228).

The art and act of writing the self and the social context that defines or redefines that self is deconstructive. It requires the interrogation of the past and the present, a form of border crossing. This is done through what Plaw (2006:18) described as "empathetic imagination" which "uniquely reveals both our past and ourselves." It is this quality among others that situates autobiography and ethnography within the same system of cultural practices as historiography. As Berlin (1998) observes,

> History and other accounts of human life are at times spoken of as being akin to art. What is usually meant is that writing about human life depends to a large extent on descriptive skill, lucidity, choice of examples, distribution of emphasis […] and the like. But there is a profounder sense in which historian's activity is an artistic one. Historical explanation is to a large degree arrangement of the discovered facts in patterns which satisfy us because they accord with life- the variety of human experience and activity –as we know it […] That is the difference that distinguishes the humane studies […] from those of nature […] (47-48).

Literature, as an alternative history, integrates the moral and the aesthetic categories. Therefore, what constitutes a 'historical narrative' is the shaping and restructuring of life experiences, the body of facts, known artifacts and records, that 'accords in some sense with our and others' experience of life as defined by particular historical moments. These characteristics are true of Nigerian migrant and travel poetry. They explain its description as ethnographic writing. When it is the poetic representation of the poet's life and experience in connection with social and cultural realities, it can be described as an autobiography with ethnographic interest. This is conceptualised in this study as poetic ethno-autobiography. Ethno-autobiography is described as a text in which the ordinary people are able to describe themselves in ways that interrogate representations that others have made of them. It is a form of self-narrative that situates the self within a social context and involves the critique of that social context and how

that context defines or re-defines the identity of the subject; how it defines the subject's self apprehension. Mark Neuman (1996: 191) describes it as follows:

> A form of critique and resistance that can be found in diverse literatures such as ethnic auto/ethnography, fiction, memoir, and texts that identify zones of contact, conquest, and the contested meanings of self and culture that accompanies the exercise of representational authority.

Nigerian migrant and travel poetry are ethno-autobiographies. They represent these poets' negotiation of the complex interplay of history and geography and how they define their construction of identity. These poets evoke the past through affective appropriation of oral resources and historical memory and explore personal experiences as identity schema. They achieve self re-apprehension and identity retrieval by engaging cultural and social realities of home and exile both as collective history and existential necessity, such that life trajectory reveals social constraints. Contemporary Nigerian life stories articulate the dual self- and cultural references of life histories as a form of post(neo)-colonial discourse and criticism. They provide peculiar insights into social experiences and thus debunk the assumption that it is essentially self-aggrandising. The social and cultural engagement of Nigerian migrant and travel poetry is aptly expressed by Olu Oguibe, a Nigerian migrant poet who resides in the United States of America, in his description of the social preoccupation of Nigerian exile (migrant) writings in general. According to him,

> Exile persists and its persistence speaks to the resilience and relevance of geography. It also underlines the inescapable desirability of belonging. It may be questioned, even ridiculed but only those who have experienced the loss of home can understand the rootlessness—and ruthlessness—of existence in the shiftless, treacherous territory of exile. Through art the exile may return, in a manner of speaking, by reconstituting the past, participating in the present, as well as envisioning a new world (2004: 16-17).

The issues of double consciousness and the problems of split personality and shifting identities are typical of trans-cultural relations. These result from social dislocations and chaotic experiences which are characteristic of the exilic and migration experiences. The construction and transformation of identities within a multicultural space and double consciousness define contemporary life and life histories. These show that these writings are social, cultural and political in preoccupation, which underscores their ethnography. The problem of double consciousness and the collective unconscious

which is central to the construction of identity is addressed by Carl Jung's psychoanalysis theory of "the Collective Unconscious".

3.2.2 Jung's Psychoanalysis Theory of the Collective Unconscious

Originally, psychoanalysis as a technique and as theory of analysis was developed by Sigmund Freud. His work, which concerns the structure and the functioning of the human mind, has defined the direction of contemporary thought. Psychoanalysis is a method of investigating unconscious mental processes and concerns a form of psychotherapy. The term also refers to the systematic structure of psychoanalytic theory, which is based on the relation of conscious and unconscious psychological processes. According to Terry Eagleton (1983), "the aim of psychoanalysis is to uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis in order to relieve the patient of his or her conflicts, so dissolving the distressing symptom"(158). It promotes "the extent to which any 'I' or human subject is *decentred*" (Andrew and Nicholas, 2004:128). Psychoanalysis, as a literary critical method concerns the exploration of the representations of personal identity in literature. As Andrew and Nicholas (2004) observes,

> Literature, like art more generally, has been concerned with aspects of what can be called the unconscious or 'not me' or other: it is and has always been centrally concerned with dreams and fantasy, hallucinations and visions, madness, trance, and other kinds of impersonality or absences of self (131).

Psychoanalysis turned attention from mere description of types of people to an interest in how people become what they are. Particularly, Psychoanalytic theory emphasises the fact that the human being is constantly, though slowly, changing as a result of interactions. Some of these interactions may bring both positive and negative impacts on the individual self and personality. The need for a better self-understanding is stressed by M. Brewster Smith. According to him:

> How people construe themselves and how their constructions are culturally phrased should interest us not only because they are humanly interesting for their own sake, and scientifically interesting for their bearing on general personality theory, but also because, as reflexively conscious creatures, people are influenced by their self-conceptions. Their metaphors of selfhood become in part self-fulfilling prophecies. A fuller understanding of this process would seem to be high in priority as knowledge that potentially contributes to human liberation (Cited in Mineke Schipper, 1993:43).

Renewed interest in studies on intercultural relations makes the understanding of how people perceive themselves, "the theories people have about themselves, about the formulations they employ to express themselves in language, and about the metaphors that are commonly linked to their sociocultural and gender contexts" (Schipper, 1993: 42) very crucial. These concern the question of personal identity and identity formation in relation to a collective consciousness and self-apprehension situated within a socio-cultural context. To this end, in a study on psychological process, and the interaction between social and personal identities, Marisa Zavalloni (1983) defines collective identity as

> A cultural product that embodies all that has been recorded as history, institution, fiction, work of art and knowledge. The sociocultural environment, of which collective identities are indeed an essential part, may be seen as the sedimented product of centuries of interactive cycles, molded through psychological process that can be considered as fixed parameters which reproduce and sometimes subvert its order (Cited in Schipper, 1993:42).

The implication of this is that individual or personal identity is the function or product of series or processes of interactions of the individual with the socio-cultural environment. In a multicultural and transnational context, this involves interactions with multiple socio-cultural environments resulting in multiple and shifting identities.

Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theory of the collective unconscious addresses the processes of the formulation of the self-identity in relations to perhaps what Marisa Zavalloni has described as "the sedimented product of centuries of interactive cycles, molded through psychological process that can be considered as fixed parameters". Carl Jung called this the "Collective Unconscious". He broadened Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical approach by interpreting mental and emotional disturbances as an attempt to find personal and spiritual wholeness. He moved away from what he saw as Freud's narrow sexual interpretation of the libido by showing the close parallels between ancient myths and psychotic fantasies and explaining human motivation in terms of a larger creative energy. According to Jung, the most important groupings of the psychic contents are Consciousness, the Personal Unconscious and the Collective Unconscious.

Also called the impersonal, objective or transpersonal psyche, the collective unconscious is the part of the psyche that owes existence exclusively to heredity, and not to personal experiences which had been conscious at one time and then disappeared from consciousness. Paul G. Durbin describes it as the "memory passed on to us by our heritage and is held in our subconscious mind. Within a person's subconscious mind is a

history of his/her ancestors to include their experiences and emotions" (Par. 12). In other words, the collective unconscious images are not inherited ideas, "but rather they refer to our innate tendency to react in a particular way whenever our personal experiences stimulate an inherited predisposition toward action". According to William Celano (2010),

> The very nature of the human mind and conditions in life led Jung to formulate the probabilities for this entity. Many neuroses and psychoses could be explained whereas an individual's mental health is contingent upon the sound influence of the collective unconscious in a particular environment. When a person is deprived of shared experiences through isolation, neglect, abuse, and other negating influences, the loss of integrated awareness overwhelms the psyche to dysfunction (Par.6).

This psychic condition and Carl Jung's division of the psyche into consciousness, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious are better explained and justified particularly through his work with schizophrenics, whose visions he postulated as being empirical manifestations of the unconscious. According to Eagleton (1983), schizophrenia

> involves a detachment from reality and a turning in on the self, with an excessive but loosely systematized production of fantasies: it is as through the 'id', or unconscious desire surged up and flooded the unconscious mind with its illogicality, riddling associations and affective rather than conceptual links between ideas. Schizophrenic language has in this sense an interesting resemblance to poetry (159).

From Jung's description of the schizophrenic process, it is "an archetypal, instinctive reaction which is distorted by grotesque, absurd and chaotic associations." This inevitably results in a split between the ego and the complexes because the schizophrenic resides in and experiences the unconscious as a normal stimulation. It emerges as a complete split and disintegration in the individual's personality which results from loss of a coherent connection with "a comprehensive psychic totality". In other words, the schizophrenic individual finds it very difficult to achieve unity of self; instead, they identify themselves with the unconscious content.

This state of disintegration and double consciousness characterise the identity crisis that defines the experience of the exile or Diaspora writer. Socio-cultural displacement creates an acute sense of isolation which makes desire for what represents belongingness and association very strong. This experience of dissonance and displacement uncover the latent connection with the primordial and cultural past. This is essentially understood at an ideological level and is provoked through self-reflection and

recollection. Nzegwu (2000:12) described this as the historical memory which is the site of self-definition because it enables the subject to make use of their experiences as material for identity schema. Nzegwu argues further that this kind of recollection "[…] occurs when queries are raised that challenge one's knowledge of history and traditional practices, and force cultural tradition to be learnt in the context of purposive action" (14).

Thus to the writer in exile or Diaspora, the act of writing becomes a therapy and a cathartic experience that, according to Zeleza (2005), serves "as an act of healing, of remembering, of recreating and returning to the elusive home of his youth" (3). In the process, words and memory are summoned in all their solemn and slippery power to give meaning to an extraordinary, fragmented life, which is permanently 'out of place' and "suspended in perpetual exile" (3). On the implications of this condition for the state of the exile writer's self, Yanick Lahens (1992) asks some pertinent questions. According to him,

> The writer's exile is often perceived as a simple departure from his native country. Therefore the critic is always tempted to measure the degree of acculturation in the work produced by the writer in the host country, whether to analyze the sterilizing or on the contrary stimulating effects of exile on literary creation. Thus all reflection on the relationship which exists between exile and literary creation leads to more profound questioning. […]. What does living in a country mean for a writer? Is not creation always indissociable from a kind of exile? And […] how is exile experienced by the writer? Isn't it too often perceived only in its relationship to politics? Is not political exile itself the duplication of something else? (735)

There is a precarious and insecure feeling constantly haunting exiles. The sense of isolation and lack of acceptance or belongingness felt by them creates a kind of dilemma between possessing the homeland resulting in fantasies or dispossessing it. With this in mind, Lahens, describes the psyche of the exile:

> To be exiled is to be here and from elsewhere, to be the same time inside and outside, settled in the insecurity of a painful and uneasy situation. And when this exile is allied with resistance, with retreat, the contradictory movements which cut through it only became sharper, nourishing a permanent oscillation between anchorage and flight. Besides the fact they force one to recognize as fundamental the feeling of the precariousness of here as much as the inaccessibility of elsewhere, these contradictory movements spare no class, no group. They threaten at the same time the ideal of a stable identity capable of being mastered at a given moment as well as fantasies of an individual or a group forever reconciled to themselves. But the discourse of identity which inevitably generated actions and writings of guilt and

> self-flagellation has been long-lived. Today it is still trying to re-emerge under cover of a blind and retrograde neo-indigenisme [sic] and populism" (Lahens, 1992:736)

Due to the political and social contradictions and crises, the human race has experienced serious rupture and dislocation. Africans on the continent, as a result of colonialism and postcolonial disillusionment, are psychologically traumatised and disenchanted. Those in the Diaspora, either as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade or as a result of modern migrations are doubly dislocated because of culture shock, displacement and marginalization. This experience results in a problem of double consciousness, and split personality resulting in identity crisis. For the purpose of self re-apprehension, and to make sense of an existence within unfriendly and marginalizing spaces they explore memory of a past that gives them a homely and accommodating feeling, although this has its own complications. They exploit traditions and cultural icons and memories that are collective heritages of their retrieved past. These traditional and oral/cultural resources fall in the realm of what Carl Jung called the "collective unconscious". As Lahens notes, writers within this domain are trapped between the longings for home and need to stay away:

> Despite the cultural hinterland constructed with resistance mechanisms and strategies of withdrawal, the writer has continued to hesitate between interior exile and exterior exile, to fantasize about a reality he has avoided or disavowed. He has never really leaned on this cultural hinterland. Riveted to this elsewhere as sure as it is in-approachable, tormented by a lost beginning and an impossible rootedness, he avoids all fixity that risks consuming him, preferring to take up residence in the ephemera of travel, assuming with difficulty the deeply rooted wandering within himself. Now let us see how this writer, always ready to take his leave, also makes the characters of his novels depart (738-739).

The idea of collective unconscious is adequately represented in the exploration of the collective memory which is demonstrated in the use of cultural icons, oral resources and collective history.

CHAPTER FOUR
ORALITY, AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN NIGERIAN MIGRANT AND TRAVEL POETRY

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore how the employment of traditional oral resources in Nigerian migrant and travel autobiographical poetry underscores their ethnographic quality. The chapter explores how African oral resources are uniquely articulated by Femi Oyebode and Remi Raji in *Master of the Leopard Hunt* and *Shuttlesongs: America* respectively to address the challenges of trans-national migration, and trans-cultural relations. Trans-national migration results in cultural dislocations and identity issues which triggered various responses in the migrants. The narration of this experience is a critique of the geo-cultural space as a form of resistance and how the writer negotiates their identity within it. It is a process of identifying what Mark Neuman (1996) describes as "zones of contact, conquest, and the contested meanings of self and culture" (191).

4.1 Migrating orality

Much has been written on how history and space have constantly defined and re-defined the way we make meaning and apprehend ourselves. Globalisation and its consequences in the form of trans-nationalism and trans-culturation have created such a complex condition that the challenge of the twenty-first century is how to be an individual without losing the collective history we share with others (See Soyinka 1976; Priebe 1988; Irele 1990; Harrow 1994). Because of inevitability of the past in the understanding of the present, especially in understanding the identity crises that characterise post-colonial African existence, the Africanness of contemporary African literature has been defined in many ways by orality. Therefore, as Ato Quayson (1997a:1) has observed,

> One of the most abiding interests of African literary criticism has been to demonstrate the continuity that African literature written in Europhone languages has with indigenous sources.

This has been demonstrated by many writers and critics in their quest for the authentication of African literature (see Obiechina 1975; Chinweizu *et al.* 1980; Chinua Achebe 1975; Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1972; Goody J. 1987; Niyi Osundare 2000**;** Tanure

Ojaide 1996; Nwachukwu-Agbada 1993; Ezenwa Ohaeto 1994, 1995; Nelson Fashina 1999). However, it is necessary to examine the affectivity of this past and its traditional oral resources and how one can compare their interpretive transitions and transformations within the same culture across time and under different cultural and social conditions and geography. Ato Quayson described this as the ethnographic reading of African literature. According to him, a proper ethnographic reading of African literature will provide a unique insight into the culturally dynamic nature of the literature and will qualify it as "a truly historical tool". Rather than projecting it as "the conservatory of inert images, tropes and cultural values", It will project it as "the predicate of the dynamic movement of history itself in both its diachronic and synchronic dimensions" (1997b:160). Attah Anthony Agbali (2008:32) addresses this perspective when he notes that the location and the experiences of writers impact their appropriation of images, symbols, and cultural signs during the creative process. According to him,

> Every literature, though often embedded within the realities of its localized context, also equally transcends such ambient, feeding upon different imaginations and modalities that flow recurrently from diverse global processes, as well as the unique intrinsic subjectivity of the writer. Literature is bound to specific localities through the kind of imageries[sic] and scenarios that shape the explanatory contours that map the literary landscaping and crafting of idea that give birth to literary productions.

Rüdiger Kunow (2002) also notes that the dynamics of trans-cultural relations and the imperative of geography are very important in the identity constructions of migrants. According to him, these identities are constantly changing and result from the interactions and mobility of subjects across borders and cultural domains, both local and international. As such, postcolonial identities are not just constantly changing but are actually defined by shiftiness and instability. They are constituted by motion. Construction of identity under these conditions, as Obododimma Oha (2009) notes, has become "terrains of struggle" which are always already "enmeshed in 'overlapping territories,' in contrasting and conflicting practices of signifying cultural difference within post-national cultural field" (194).

For instance, in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Wole Soyinka attempts to make sense of African cultural identity, how "the African world perceives itself as cultural entity" and how others are to understand it. He does this by situating his imaginative representations within the history, ritual and myth (mytho-poetics) of his

Yoruba background. In the preface to the book, Soyinka explains the main thrust of his appropriation of oral resource of Yoruba culture as the attempt to elicit "the African self-apprehended world in myth and literature" (ix). He explains further that his preoccupation has been "with the process of apprehending [his] own world in its full complexity, also through its contemporary progression and distortions" (ix). This engagement of history, mythology and literature, according to Soyinka, is hoped to benefit "both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance […] in contemporary world reality" (xi).

Abiola Irele (1990) also examined the deployment of Yoruba oral traditions by three writers in their works across time and space, serving as "a bridge between the traditional cultural heritage and Western metropolitan culture" (Quayson 1997a: 4). He also examined how differing realities and experiences of these writers defined their attitudes to the same body of oral resources. Under this condition, Quayson observes that "the Yoruba literary tradition is invoked not so much as a means of tracing the movement of literary value and taste but as a means of delineating a cultural praxis" (1997a: 5). In essence, this tradition is mobile and affective. Irele (1990) alludes to this literary attitude when he recalls Eliot's conception of "Tradition" in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in his analyses of the Yoruba literary tradition. Reacting to Eliot's essay, Irele observes:

> [W]hat strikes one as significant about this essay is the original understanding which it offers of the meaning of 'tradition' – as not so much an abiding, permanent, immutable stock of beliefs and symbols, but as the constant refinement and extension of these in a way which relates them to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and significantly new (174).

In another instance, Irele (1995) examines ways in which Africans and people of African descent have attempted over time to connect to the African ethos and explains that the "thematisation" of Africa in African writings is actually dynamic and transformational. According to him, the important thing is "the affective stance that tradition determines and the imaginative projections and intellectual constructions that it conditions in the specific historical context of its thematisation within African discourse". Thus, as Quayson (1997a) argues, "the thematisation of tradition" is seen essentially as a strategy by which Africans locate themselves "simultaneously in relation to an African ethos as well as to the rest of the world more generally" (9). Within the

geography of exile and migratory experiences, the conceptualisation of orality is likely to take on new significations too. Henry Louis Gates Jnr. describes this as the "double-toned" nature of African literature, while Oha (1996: iv) calls it the "double-voiced nature of African literary production." Therefore, a critical analysis of such texts would ordinarily take into consideration the transformations that necessarily have occurred to the resources. As Louis Gates Jnr. notes, their evaluation must be subjected to multiple critical standards such that, "while paying due homage to the cultural sources of the writing, a critic ought to rise above essentialising cultural sources" (Oha 1996: iv).

Quayson (1997a) examines the deployment of oral resources in the creative works of three Nigerian writers and the strategic transformations that occurred across time and from one writer's exploration of these oral resources to the other. By tracing the explorations of Yoruba oral resources and forms in the writings of Fagunwa, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri, Quayson maps the transformations that occur in the semantic imports of these oral facilities over time and their exploration within various social and historical contexts. In doing this, he attempts, in his own words, "to show how the set of concepts made available by the Yoruba writers are no longer limitable to the Yoruba but have become available for conceptualizing a larger sense of identity" (9). In other words, those traditional oral resources derivable from the Yoruba culture and history have undergone transformations as they are explored and conceptualised within social realities outside the immediate Yoruba consciousness such that their semantic imports have also transcended that implied by the Yoruba original context. Also by relating these various explorations of Yoruba oral resources with Rev. Samuel Johnson's historiography of the same Yoruba, Quayson demonstrates and defines the relationship between these frameworks of literary production. According to him, his main objective is to determine,

> the ambit of the relationships between orality and written discourses as one of the strategic deployment of orality for different purposes; that is, a literary tradition not solely in terms of literary value but also in terms of the strategic location of each of the writers in relation to larger historical realities (Quayson 1997a: 10).

Therefore, the transposition of these resources within different contexts also alters their significations. In this chapter, I attempt to examine how African/Yoruba oral resources are deployed by Femi Oyebode in his autobiographical poetry, *Master of the Leopard Hunt* (1995) and Remi Raji's poetic travelogue, *Shuttlesongs: America* (2003)

to address peculiar experiences in their encounters with Europe and America as exile and travel writers respectively. The aim is to demonstrate how this defines the cultural constitution of the texts as ethno-autobiographical poetry which is a culturally constituted autobiographical poetry. It seeks to explore cultural elements such as racialism, ethos and question of space which are associated particularly with trans-national and cross-cultural relations.

4.2 Orality and self-reinvention in exile in Femi Oyebode's *Master of the Leopard Hunt*

Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Femi Oyebode studied medicine at the University of Ibadan before migrating as a student to England where he trained in psychiatry at Newcastle–upon-Tyne. He now lives in Moseley, Birmingham with his wife and children where he practices medicine as a professor of psychiatry at the University of Birmingham.

Femi Oyebode started to explore the problem of identity and the dynamism of culture in his first book of poetry, *Naked to Your Softness and Other Dreams* (1989), and has followed up the same themes in his other collections of poems such as *Wednesday is a Colour* (1990), *Forest of Transformations* (1991), *Adagio for Oblong Mirrors* (1993) and *Master of the Leopard Hunt* (1995). These collections of autobiographical poems narrate variously the experiences of the poet as an emigrant and as exile in Europe. For the purpose of this study, I will pay attention particularly to his last collection of poem, *Master of the Leopard Hunt* (1995). In this collection, as in the rest of his poetry, the poet articulates his experiences as an immigrant (an exile) in Europe. He explores the cultural memory and oral resources of his Yoruba roots as way of authenticating his identity and validating his being. As an exile, he engages the problems of cultural displacement and fragmentation, double consciousness and the resultant identity crisis.

4.2.1 Myth, being, self and identity construction

In the blurb of the collection, *Naked to Your Softness and Other Dreams* (1989), Oyebode's poetry is said to have been influenced by the "landscape of Yoruba mythology and the place of the individual in a changing world." Through this, he foregrounds "the irreconcilable postmodern chaos which creates the tensions within" and the geographical and cultural contradictions that this engendered (Okome 1996:4). This conflict of being and existential contradictions pitch the Self against the 'Other' in

a battle for survival and authenticity. The articulation of the oppositional realities, which define postmodern and postcolonial existence in the poetry of Oyebode, is aptly expressed by Oshita O. Oshita (1996) thus:

> In these books, the poet explores the immensity of the *self, the other*, the plurality of things and the omnipresence of God within the *two-dimensional* world of his Yoruba (African) birth-place and Europe where he sojourns. Assembling his poems from the totality of his cultural background, the poet brings his deep personal knowledge of his roots to bear on his circumstances in the 'new' world of Europe (26).

In order to make sense of his existence as an exile, a new and different socio-cultural space, Oyebode draws from the traditional repository of his homeland. This traditional oral resource defines particular historical moments, which he needs for the reconstruction of his sense of being and identity. For this to make sense to his present situation, he would need to adapt it peculiarly and to reinterpret it to bear the burden of his experience. He, however, acknowledges the fact that these resources may not be able to express his thoughts and experiences in the same mode in which they are originally constructed because the context of his appropriation of them is different. In *Master of the Leopard Hunt*, the rhetoric of historical memory "differentiates the identities" of the poet and that of the historical and mythical artist in the poem as a result of their different relations to the cultural sources explored. This is because their "mastery of cultural semiosis" (Oha 1996: 103) varies. The poet expresses this in the poem, "An Uninterrupted Stain of Bodies":

> I have asked the words for the grain and grape
> For the juices, the lines to adorn my thoughts
>
> But the words too, poor words, are frail
> For I am not the master, not the steadfast thorn
>
> *Master of the Leopard Hunt* (52)

In previous lines, the poet acknowledges this disparity of identity. Due to the non-fixity of the semantics of the "master's" text and words, he decided to make the best of the situation by simply telling his own story while allowing "meaning" to "flow from me, a river". In order words, he admits the fact that time and distance have redefined his relationship with the cultural essence that his roots represent. As such, his consciousness becomes chaotic and his identity nebulous as a result of which he chooses to appropriate the personality of the mythical persona, the 'master of the Leopard hunt'. Thus, through

this process of appropriation, meaning will be imputed to his experience and some form of order will be achieved:

> In this story, my story, like Nun,
> I will have no shape, no visible fabric
>
> I will merely enclose an abstracted space
> But meaning will flow from me, a river
> (*Master*, 7)

This complex contextualisation of traditional reality is described by Oha as semantically plural and deconstructive (1996: 103). As artist, the poet decides to tell his story as an African living within the geography of the European Other but in order to do this properly, he needs to situate himself again within the cultural and spiritual space of his homeland. Therefore, he decides to read the history and culture of the homeland as narrated by the mythical artist and through the consciousness of the master of the leopard hunt reconnect himself to the spring of his culture.

For example, the poet's use of the symbol "Nun" in the above poem, which is connected to the idea of river, is instructive. It reminds one of Gabriel Okara's "Nun" in "The Call of the River Nun". However, its immediate signification in this poem is the chaos that is characteristic of the exilic existence. It also suggests the order and meaning that comes to the being of the poet as a result of his reunion with his source, his homeland essentially, and how this helps him to make sense of his contradictory consciousness. In Egyptian mythology, Nun is the oldest of the ancient Egyptian gods and is the father of *Re*, the sun god. In this context, the name, Nun, means "primeval waters"; Nun represented the waters of chaos out of which *Re-Atum* began creation (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2010). The qualities of Nun which include boundlessness, darkness, and the turbulence of stormy waters, thus describe the double consciousness, shifting identities of the poet-exile and the unavoidable chaos that results from cultural and spatial dislocations. As Oha (1996: 105) also notes, "the incomprehensible and complex nature of Oyebode's "Nun" becomes a paradigm ("like Nun") for the narrative". In other words, it represents the complex and problematic narrative of exile and dislocation and suggests the postmodern condition of the poet. It also demonstrates the fragmentation of the poet's experience. This state of being is expressed in what is described by Oha (1996: 105) as "mixed metaphorization", a shift from one image to another as expressed by the poet in the following lines:

Nun embodied all the shades of grey, the tempers
The contours and attitude of magma, the humours

Nun contained the complexities of geometry
Indenting the sides and planes of movement

Transferring whole continents beyond suffering
To a fissure where memory debars dreaming

Nun enunciated the nothingness of wonder,
The asceticism, the matchless ruthlessness,

The cold objectivity of radiant,
Radiant and poisonous power
(*Master* 55)

Oyebode examines and re-examines his identity problem, a kind of self re-discovery, by exploring a cultural past in a mythical voyage, through the celebration of an ancient Bini Sculptor whose art he juxtaposes with his own creative engagement. But, as is shown in the poems, there is a gap between his experience and creative consciousness and that of the master sculptor. The poet's narrative is chaotic and complex; his "Nun contained the complexities of geometry/Indenting the sides and planes of movement". He compares himself with the traditional and mythical artist in the poem, the master of the leopard hunt, and acknowledges the fact that they are incomparable:

[he] "…knew the clarity of his logic, and also his vulgarity
Like his chisel, his precision and energy, I was not him
(*Master* 19),

For I am not the master,
The master of the leopard hunt
(*Master* 55).

The displacement and alienation caused by physical distance from the "master's" cultural consciousness, which consequently necessitates a semantic re-ordering and signification, is demonstrated in his use of contradictions. He uses these contradictions to describe his Nun, his chaotic identity. As earlier explained, the Nun represents chaos, disorder, or fragmentation. The qualities of the poet's experience are clearly revealed in his choice of words as in the following excerpt:

The sulphurous seas, the face of faceless places
And light and silence enslaved the sand, the caves,

Invaded Nun's radical displacement of distances

And like art, threaded storms, implosions, precise laws

Defining colour, gravity, particle:
Numberless accidents designed the immutable truth

And this truth limited the span of Nun's arms
The trajectory and width of each star, each planet

This truth encoded the courtship of one mass and another
And ringed the cold and infernal into Nun's character

Inserting remoteness within intimacy, within finitude
(*Master* 3-4)

Expressions such as "the sulphurous seas" and "the face of faceless places" in the first line; "threaded storms", and "implosions" in line four above are suggestive of the chaos and tension that characterises the psyche and experience of the poet. The inequality and difference in the experiences of the poet persona and the master of the leopard hunt is also indicated in the need for the "courtship" of the master by the poet persona and the existing chaos is tamed as the "cold and inferno" are submerged in the personality of the Nun. Therefore, his nun is typical of the mythical nun itself. It is out of these contradictory experiences that he attempts to formulate a new and unique identity and, as it were, the contradiction actually defines his identity and underscores the impossibility of return to the pristine self.

Also, in another sense, this is suggestive of the transmutation of the creative consciousness of the master of the leopard hunt into that of the poet in some very mystical manner: "This truth encoded the courtship of one mass and another /And ringed the cold and infernal into Nun's character." This, perhaps, signifies the poet's double consciousness. There is cohabitation of the cold and the hot inferno, remoteness and intimacy. This duality defines the chaotic character of the Nun, which has become a metaphor for the poet. Thus, through some mystical and mythical dimension, the "distances" of the poet / Nun are "invaded" and bridged. This obviously creates some tension and identity crisis for and within the poet which generates what Okome (1996: 2) describes as perpetual reconstruction "of *self* and *society* on the one hand", and "a redefinition of the *self* in political practices" on the other hand. In this peculiar response to the geography of exile in Europe, the poet recalls his historical memory of home as "the inalienable post of rest" in order to reconstruct his real *self*, and to prevent it from disintegration. Through this, he is able to ensure a wholesomeness of being and a

relatively stable identity. But his exploration of the past and oral traditional art forms is not raw or primordial. Rather, it realistically reflects the imperatives of his immediate experiential condition. Therefore, while the poet tries to connect with the past in a romantic manner, he is aware of the implications of his own historic present for such an attempt and engagement.

4.2.2 Yoruba epistemology and excursion into self retrieval

The poet's mystical journey into the metaphysical realm of the ancestors echoes what the poet already addressed in other collections of his poems, especially in the *Forest of Transformation*. In this text we see Oyebode's excursion into the Yoruba cultural realm. Essentially, this excursion is constructed around the ideas or concepts of birth, living and dying, which are the three levels of existence that characterise the Yoruba and possibly African consciousness: the world of the unborn/birth, the world of the living/destiny/ manifestation/fulfillment, and the world of the dead/ancestors/dying. This circle of existence is also evident in Wole Soyinka's understanding of the Yoruba/African world view. It also defines the consciousness of writers such as D.O Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri as shown in their creative explorations of the Yoruba mythology and concept of being. We see this motif of death and life in all of Oyebode's works, though demonstrated in different ways. In *Forest of Transformations*, for instance, it is used as a way to life from the dead; a kind of reincarnation or a rebirth. However, Oyebode employs this motif in his poetry as the cultural psyche-space for understanding, retrieving and articulating or re-constructing his identity which has been complicated by the postmodern chaos. In this text, Oyebode explores one's spiritual essence and physical existence and how the socio-cultural space defines or redefines them. Oshita (1996), distinguishes existence and essence by explaining that while existence is physical, essence concerns the spiritual:

> Existence refers to the concrete presence in a spatio-temporal dimension while essence points to the consciousness of being without which human existence is naught. Consciousness orders existence and its manifold experiences and expressions (27).

In this context, Oyebode considers existentialism as an issue within the post-colonial condition of the African migration which is represented in his own experience of exile. In doing this, he examines his past both geo-spatially and culturally, as an African and Yoruba. Through this he underscores the fact that there is need for the knowledge of the past in the understanding of the present and in the articulation and

negotiation of a future, all of which are defined by different historical moments and realities. What is the conception of being within these historical spaces and contexts? How do these ideas of being interrelate towards enhancing the understanding of the present *self* within the geography of exile? These questions seem to preoccupy the poet's mind in his exploration of the oral and traditional resources as an exile displaced from that traditional cultural space.

Using a journey motif, the poet travels through the collective cultural memory and cultural landscape of his homeland. This negotiation and effort at self-discovery and apprehension takes place in what Wole Soyinka (1976) called the "fourth stage" (140), the liminal space that connects the living with the dead, and the dead with the unborn. This is mythical and historical at the same time.

This journey is described in its metaphysical dimension by the exploration of the significance of the number seven as is used in *Forest of Transformations* and in the title poem, "Forest of transformation". In this poem, the poet passes through seven stages towards self retrieval and this is demonstrated in the narrative order of the poem. Seven is symbolic in Yoruba consciousness; it is a ritual process which implies completeness and totality (Oyin Ogunba 1973). The voyage is a ritual practice of a sort and, therefore, the choice of the number seven (7) sounds quite appropriate. This number is invested with mythical significance in the encounter between the "corpse" and the "I" antagonist, the vocal narrative split of the poet. The "corpse" is presumably the neglected *other* which represents the traditional half of the poet persona.

Thus, the poet employs the ritual mode to express his search for identification and self-rediscovery; the merging of the split halves that have become his experience. There is a problem of schizophrenia and split personality caused by both the physical and spiritual displacement that resulted from the colonial and post-colonial conditions of the subject. In order to reconnect with this spiritual space, the essence and the existence need to meet and attempt an understanding of each other and possibly achieve unification. According to Bamikunle (1996), the image of the 'forest of transformation' "is a direct reference to the Yoruba 'igbo oro' (forest of the deity)" (53). 'Igbo oro' is the grove of the ancestors and divinities; it is a space for spiritual intercourse between the gods, the ancestors and the initiated. In this case, the dialogue is between the poet persona and the estranged self, the "corpse" just as it is between the poet and the experienced mythical master sculptor, the master of the Leopard hunt. The first stage shows the encounter as described in the lines below:

The corpse stood up,
his eyes sighing, his evening rigid
his time not aching in any rhythm,
the distance beyond his coffin shifted;
he detached his implacable sorrow, undressed
dropping each groan, each dark stain of aro…
then he turned to me,
to my unequal ears, my eccentric chest,
(*Forest of Transformations*, 48)

At this stage of the journey and encounter there is what can be described as resurrection and quickening but there is not any form of recognition. There is, however, a conscious attempt to connect and communicate when the corpse turns to the poet persona and tries to communicate with him non-verbally but somewhat telepathically, to his "unequal ears" and his "eccentric chest". This encounter is essentially spiritual and takes place within the psychic space.

After this spiritual encounter, the effort begins to overcome the chaos that has characterised his exilic consciousness and to achieve some harmony of being. As it were, it is the poet persona who needs to come to terms with this past, this cultural essence. This is because he is the one that has been disconnected from the root and, therefore, needs a return home. The poet persona expresses this in the following lines:

As he stood in the middle of his rooms,
I floated, in and out of his spirit…
He began to shed his skin, to surrender;
(*Forest of Transformations*, 48-49)

This suggests an attempt by the persona to negotiate the spiritual and cultural spaces of the homeland and to establish some understanding and connection. This attempt, however, is not yet stable enough to provide a solid footing although it yields some result; the corpse "began to shed his skin" and "to surrender". However, before this surrender, the persona comes face to face with his past, his travails and human pains. He confronts this other history of himself in the "corpse"; his transformations and accepts it:

i listen to the child in his shiver,
and we spoke without words, without warmth
now ochre, now topaz, now ague,
the stain of famine, his many diseases, his history sobbed;
i looked again at him, at his joints,
his borrowed appendages, space crowded into his breath,
….
i flouted his gravity, floating in his cough,
glistering, assailed by the corners of his sin,
the gout in his nights gathered;

A careful reading of these lines also reveals the fact that the poetic persona's experiences are also those of his homeland in its birth, growth, the challenges and pains that characterise the experience of colonialism and the processes of decolonisation. As a post-colonial subject, his present condition was created by two different histories: the pre-colonial history of his native land before the invasion by the locust of colonialism. The second is the history of the colonial encounter between the native land and its epistemological orientation with that of the invading colonialists. The post-colonial condition and particularly the condition of exile is the fallout from the crises created by the contacts of the two. Thus, what the poet person does in these poems is to interrogate these contact zones and the realities they throw up. It is an excursion into self understanding and self retrieval.

In the second stage of the encounter, there is some connection between the two selves. In ritualised conversation, a sort of cultic dance occurs:

> We danced, we settled into a storm,
> partly the storm ourselves, partly the dark night,
> we shivered in this territory of hidden dreams,
> we were not graceful in our fall when we fell
> as a cool rain and gathered into a puddle,
> into a comfortless huddle;
>
> (*Master*, 49)

Like on the journey of the palm wine 'drinkard' in the forest of ghosts as he searches for his wine tapper, in Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard,* the poet persona and the other self "...drained from one puddle to another, / then into a stream;/" they "flowed past disembodied memories / past a family of diseases,…" progressively until they get to a familiar space of the ancestors where they get some form of hope:

> My corpse spoke to the paltry harvests,
> groping for the shrines, the true gods, the piety
> of our common past, this crowd of ancestors in wait
> his lips moulded ancient words, incantations,
>
> (*Master*, p. 51)

The space they arrived at here is scary; they reach the domains of the ancestors, the abode of "true gods" and the center of the collective history where all the tribes derive their essence and consolidate their being. But because the person has been alienated from this site and has, therefore, lost the secret to the shrines, he merely follows. The corpse leads on toward the reclamation of the lost essence and culture.

Once this step has been taken, there is a degree of union between the two selves which results in some form of conversation. There seems to some kind of re-initiation as a result of which they are able to converse with understanding. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of confidence in the act. They are not confident enough to confront the whole of their past experience, and the desolation that characterises this past. The poet expresses these as follow:

> we talked about the true gods,
> we spoke for a long time,
> like old friends asking all the questions people asked,
> the question with no answers, the intimacy of silence;
> the middle, about loving, about living without passion,
> we talked about walking, about running,
> about the colourful passage through dreams,
> we talked about everything
> except about ashes each person lines his soul with.
>
> *(Master, 53)*

Finally, they advance in the journey and reach a point when there is a true communion and the poet persona "…crept into" his "corpse, into the expunged waste". Then, he becomes fully initiated and is able to pronounce "the secret words again, / and rose as ourselves, corpse and fate /death and purveyor, fragments of time" (p. 57). The real moment of self re-discovery comes when:

> My corpse seemed closer to me
> his crushed and embittered portfolio
> lay beside him, not with him
> his weight had lost his heaviness, he was losing the dross;
> three butterflies landed in our silence
> three butterflies adjusted
> the speechless ganglion of silence;
> the night flew on across the sky,
> and delirium became a familiar haunt,
> a personal daemon, an old possession;
> when the weather broke,
> we were spent and irretrievable.
>
> (*Master*, 58)

There is at this point complete understanding, purification and self retrieval. The process has been so tedious that the persona and his corpse are sapped of strength and they fall into a blissful state of fulfillment. They are united irretrievably.

This journey toward self discovery and retrieval from the crisis of identity in exile, like that of Tutuola's magical voyages, especially in *The Palmwine Drinkard*, is a long mythic search for completeness and order. The importance of the poet's

appropriation of Yoruba mythology and supernaturalism and its transmutation into the physical and geo-space of exile is the fact the divinities that make up this pantheon represent the collectiveness of the experience of the homeland. They represent the collective history, and memory of the people and the origination of their being and identity. To the poet persona, it is the collective unconscious which he reactivates for the purpose of self reconstruction and wholeness. According to Oha (2009), they are texts of collective experience, records of the past to which all may return as a common source of identity and self validation:

> These divinities are not just entities, but texts of collective consciousness, which are now used in framing the postcolonial presence of the past. One finds in the case of Wole Soyinka a similar appropriation of the Yoruba pantheon as a semiotic system in the quest for a re-articulation of social experience, although he charts a course that, as Lewis Nkosi has noted, celebrates the action of "the isolated individual". (187)

Femi Oyebode deliberately appropriates oral resources as a body of arts and artefacts, which embody African/Yoruba history, culture, and social consciousness. He employs them in these autobiographical accounts of his experiences as an exile within a not too friendly environment as schema for identity construction. In an isolating and marginalising cultural space, the poet decides to return home in a way, to seek company, a sense of belonging and wholeness. He achieves spiritual reunion with his primordial essence by adapting the traditional knowledge and epistemological orientation of this world to his condition as an exile to assist him to reinvent himself. In his appropriation of the Yoruba traditional resources within the trans-cultural spaces of Europe, Femi Oyebode exhibits a certain degree of eagerness and anxiety. His relationship to these oral and traditional resources is both desperate and existential; he connects with them nebulously to revalidate his identity. To him, they are not just inert images or tropes and iconic materials to be commercialised for artistic ends. Rather, they are to him spiritual and transcendental umbilical cords that connect his fragmented being to his spiritual and true essence. They are his identity and personality and the history of where he was and how he becomes what he is, although like the chameleon and the yew tree, these are taking on the colour of multiple realities and creating a complex labyrinth of selves. History, personal experiences and the cultural space and how these interrelate within the postmodern domain would determine the directions and hues that the writer's sensibility takes.

4.3 Orality, history, memory and the landscape of the 'other' in Remi Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America*

If Oyebode's appropriation of oral resources is for the purpose of self-apprehension and identity retrieval as an exiled migrant, Remi Raji's deployment of the same oral material is for a different reason. The peculiar attitudes of these writers and their different patterns of mytho-poetics are possibly due to their relationships to the geographies that define their creative consciousness. Oyebode writes from the position of a migrant who is deeply engaged in and with the geography of exile and who, as a result of the duration of separation from the homeland, has an almost diasporic status. This status increases his sense of disconnectedness and double consciousness. On the other hand, Remi Raji's creative disposition is rather bold and ethnographic. Therefore, Remi Raji's attitude to the geography of the 'Other' is transgressive and self-consciously interrogative. He writes like a traveler who is aware of freedom and possibility of a return to his homeland. The difference in the relational dispositions to the cultural and social spaces they engage define their different deployments of the same oral resources. Nevertheless, both of them use these cultural resources to memorialize the past and articulate the present as post-colonial subjects in search of an authentic self.

Another obvious difference between these poets' use of the oral resources is in the nature of their collections of poems. While Oyebode's *Master of the Leopard Hunt* is autobiographical exile poetry Remi Raji's *Shttlesongs: America* is a poetic travelogue. Although a travelogue is by nature an autobiographical writing, the stand point from which the travel writer sees the geo-cultural space of their experience is different from that from which an exile writer sees their context of experience.

4.3.1 Travelogue as trans-spatial and trans-cultural narrative

Shuttlesongs America is a post-colonial poetic travelogue. In contrast with the colonial metropolitan travellers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contemporary travel writers can be described as *counter-travelers*, a term we have derived from Lopez Ropero (2003) who asserts that rather than engaging in the entertainment of the reader with the exotic, "*countertravel writing* aims at shaking the reader's complacency through the 'unmapping' of 'mapped' world views" (54). According to Edwards and Graulund (2003), recent travel writings are used to generate and present alternative representations of cultures in direct opposition to Eurocentric understanding and

exploration of the genre. As a poet-traveller, who has experienced the American geo-cultural space, Remi Raji gives ethnographic account of his encounter with the social climates as a post-colonial subject. *Shuttlesongs* is the result of the poet's visit to the United States of America in 1999 as a participant at the Summer Institute in American Studies at West Michigan University and as a visiting scholar at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL in March 2001. In the course of these travels the poet visited several places, though as guided tours, and recorded his experiences in the form of poems. The poet states this fact in the "Author's Note":

> I have seen historic places therefore I memorise these into movement of songs; I have seen artifacts and museums therefore I try to re-paint the observed experience into enchanted lines; and the voices and sounds that I have heard have become ready chisels in the forge of my verse (vii)

Travel writings are usually autobiographical and thrive on recollection. Apart from this, it provides an eye witness account of the journey of the travel writer. In this way, according to Rahbek (2002: 22), the travelogue describes multiple spaces, the place the traveler leaves behind and the place that they are journeying towards. Oha (2003) notes that travel writings are usually about border crossing and about the exploration of the space of the Other. While playing on memory and recollection, it addresses issues of identity and representation of cultures as an eye witness. According to Oha,

> A traveler becomes a witness to what is seen, heard, touched, felt, and constructing the identity of witness is partly one of the commitments of the travel writing. Often this is revealed in the narrative point of view, especially the narrator-involved technique (of the first-person narration). But even beyond the challenge of constructing the identity of the authentic witness, the travel writer also positions his/her cultural identity against the one(s) s/he encounters (2003:137).

He observes that this relational dynamic is transgressive and violates cultural boundaries, and creates dialogues between cultures thereby challenging any form of cultural hegemony (2009:182). When it concerns dialogues between African and Euro-American cultures, the purpose is to reinvent the past, interrogate the present and challenge the hegemonic Western value-system. In this manner, *Shuttlesongs: America* presents to the reader a critical and self-conscious account of the poet's encounter with the United States of America as the cultural space of a dominant 'Other'. Thus, armed with historical memories of the culture(s) concerned, the writer preserves and creates knowledge through the chosen process of creative production. The poet employs oral

resources and artifacts as reading lenses for his interrogation of American cultural and historic spaces he visited such that the "cultural presence of the Self is determined in the presence of the Other, not the Other's absence" (Oha, 2009:185).

4.3.2 **History, myth and the deconstruction of the 'Other'**

The interrogative posturing of *Shuttlesongs: America* and its transgressive use of orality are first evident in the cover design of the book of poems. The historical and cultural interrogation of the engaged spaces is underscored by the overturning of the American historical and cultural symbols and their replacement with the poet's Yoruba and Nigerian substitutes. In an interview with E.E. Sule, which was published in the February 20, 2005 edition of the *Leadership Magazine*, Remi Raji explains the semantic and cultural implications of these iconic manipulations:

> You see the book for the first time and you think it is covered with American flag. It is not. The main colours of American flag were appropriated from the traditional and ceremonial colours of the original settlers of the Native Americans in a particular Native American tribe […]. It is just mere coincidence. But beyond that, you look at the image of the statues of liberty that you think is on the cover. But it is not. It is the image of an African woman, carrying that Yoruba's insignia of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. And then you see the impression of the middle passage, of boats, real ships, conveying people across the ocean. Behind that you find the pocket of huts representing the different West African Kingdoms, where people were taken to the New World. But the first thing that an unsuspecting reader will see that will invite him, or distract him, or infuriate him, is the American colour, which is not (45).

The passage is quoted in full because it provides a very useful and authoritative framework with which to read the text. Meanwhile, what Remi Raji has done with these emblems and tropes is a signification of their levels of meanings and the histories behind these meanings. He then appropriates these histories and meanings as cultural and historical lenses through which he views America as an imperial/colonial and a dominant metropolitan cultural 'Other'. America's imperialism is evident in the historic encounter between America and the native Indians who were living the territory of the New World. In the process of settling in this territory, America destroyed those that opposed it and subjugated the others. America's imperial and colonial power is also demonstrated in the enslavement of Africans who were shipped from Africa to America as slaves to work on its many plantations.

First, the colours of the American flag were appropriated from the colours of the Native Americans. These people who were displaced from their land and almost completely erased provoked the poet's memory of similar experience by Africans when slave traders came to West Africa to displace Africans and carry them into slavery in the New World. This has been known as the Middle Passage. The slavers came back later during the scramble for Africa to colonise the remnants and to kill those who dared to resist. As such, there is a juxtaposition of the Native American history and that of their African counterpart. There are two significations of border-crossing and trans-cultural engagements in these representations: between African, (Nigeria/Yoruba) and American spaces; between African and the Native American cultural spaces. The fact that the flag is manipulated is important just as it is also important that the original owners of the real colours of the American flag are the Native Americans. Could the poet be suggesting that the flag signifies the criminality and deception of the American historical past? The poet notes in the section entitled "Peter Whitmer's Hill Cumorah":

Open the new book of the latter
Religion
You will find an American Christ
among murmuring natives
(32)

Could this be suggesting the sacrifice of the African and Native American for American self-interest and the subsequent silencing of the survivors through deliberate historical falsification and acts of racial discriminations and marginalization? It may also signify America's manipulation and use of the Christian religion as a mask and instrument of domination.

Second, the configuration of the travails of the slaves through the Middle Passage, represented in this case by the boats and ships, is an equal testimonial of the transgressive and deconstructionist viewing of America by the poet. It is instructive also to note that the signification of these slave boats and ships is done in interconnection with the original cultural spaces of the colonial subjects, which is represented here by the West African huts and villages. This perspective is both combative and interrogative and creates a charged space of post-colonial encounters and historical interpretation of the valorised American culture. That these appropriations of symbols and tropes are "mere coincidence" is definitive of the memory of the poet and consequently, his creative psyche and consciousness or sub-conscious. This is consistent with Nzegwu's

(2000:1) observation that "art production psychically re-members identities through validating and refreshing experiences."

Again, the subversion of the statue of liberty is instructive. The poet replaces the original details of the statue with some African (Yoruba) cultural and religious symbols signifying the poet's historical and cultural memory and how these have defined his reading and interpretations of the American cultural space. This historical memory interferes with his sighting of the West. The poet, in a process of oral transformation, employs, in a fresh manner, the Yoruba mytho-historical properties and oral resources as a new mythography. As Levi-Strauss (1973) observes, "(a) mythic system can only be grasped in a process of becoming, not something inert and stable but a process of perpetual transformation" (354). It is in this vein that Quayson (1997a) describes Soyinka's deployment of the Ogun myth in his literary works, for instance, as an exploration of "the essence of Yoruba drama and cultural sensibilities":

> It is a crucial intervention and is done with a large project in mind. The Ogun myth offers a huge payout of 'sign, symbol and agency' which guides his thinking in various directions simultaneously but still keeps it within the same conceptual ambit provided by the myth (67).

Remi Raji's adoption of the Sango and Oya myth is significant and defining of the essence of his Yoruba cultural sensibility. He situates his narration within the structure of his Yoruba history and cultural memory. Thus, the poet's narration becomes both the biography of his homeland, Nigeria (and his immediate Yoruba cultural group) and his own autobiography. This historical memory is what Nzegwu (2000: 12) describes as "the faculty of self-definition [that] enables us to make use of our experiences as building blocks for our identity schema, and to translate knowledge into usefulness." These representations become a pre-figuration of the poet's encounters with the geo-spaces that defined his experience and narration: his homeland (and Africa) and America.

Therefore, through the historical and cultural lens, the poet dipped his critical mind into the cultural artifacts that populate the American cultural landscape. This encounter is defined by the notion of difference and the binary of the Self and the 'Other'. In this sense, *Shuttlesongs: America* is a voyage, a mental re-enactment of the Middle Passage mediated by the poet's memory and sense of history of Africa's past. Using Oha (2003) words, this does not only bring

> up issues of how an African writer views or imagines America, but also the question of how the semiotic and stylistic devices employed do stage aesthetic and cultural conversations between Africa and America" (139).

Therefore, the poems in the collection are documentations of his encounters with American cultural and historical spaces, 'chiseled' in the forge of his 'verse'. His opening statement in the segment of the collection simply titled "Kalamazoo" ably expresses this:

> Kalamozoo
> I arrived light
> Heavy with the dust of an ancient
> civilization
> I, singer of dimple songs
> My chest filled with unsung tales
> of my native land …
> I sought new dreams, new faces, new
> souls
> Spring in my feet, summer on my brow
> I, namesake of laughter ….
> My greenhorn tale grows
> on the wings of butterfly affection…
> I arrived tenderly in a boat of stories.
>
> (2-3)

There is obviously a mixture of ignorance and knowledge, experience and naivety in the poet's disposition to his encounter with America. While his chest is filled with "unsung tales" of his native land", his attraction to the American space amounts to "greenhorn tale" that "grows / on the wings of butterfly affection", an affection that is naïve in its tenderness. Thus, propelled by "the wings of butterfly affection …" he began his "green horn" exploration of history, of memory and of actual realities that are sited on the American cultural and political geography. Present realities converse with his memory of the hidden tales. He encounters the double standard of history and saw the pains bellied by time in the eyes of the measured affluence of the present:

> …a place where possibilities
> become realities"…
> Where they planted plastic cows
> in every block where the land drips
> with milk, and the lakes glow
> with honeyed eyes …
>
> (Chicago, 6)

Yet, his historical memory of what has transpired within this American space now covered "with milk" reveals the hidden tales of slavery that characterise the history of the South: "the plastic juke box houses / of little lives / in the South ..". A place where life's contradictions are so real and yet so common and daily they are like "a movie / where Dream and Nightmare walk / hand in hand." (8) This takes us back to the significance of the interplay of cultures, myths and history from the African (Yoruba) and American backgrounds. It is important to attempt a semiotic interpretation of these significations.

4.3.3 Race and the interrogating the American master narrative

Historically, the American statue of liberty has deep significance and meanings in relation to the emergence of America as a political entity. Originally, the statue of liberty was a gift to America by France in 1886 to commemorate the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence. It has the following features: a woman wearing *a stola*, a radiant crown (with seven spikes) and sandals, which tramples a broken chain. She carries *a torch* in her raised right hand and *tabula ansata*, on which the date of the Declaration of Independence *JULY IV MDCCLXXVI* is inscribed, in her left arm. According to historical records, the appearance of this woman is classical in origin (including the stola, sandals, and facial expression). It is said to have been derived from Libertas, an ancient Roman goddess of freedom from slavery, oppression, and tyranny. The Statue's right foot is on the move as the left one tramples broken chains that symbolise broken shackles of oppression and tyranny. This general appearance is also connected to the Greek Sun-god, Apollo, or the Roman Sun-god, Helios. The general impression is that the statue symbolises "the values that the United States should venerate and to which it should aspire" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2010).

However, in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning,* Victor Frank, an existential therapist, critically looked at the relationship between the signification of the Statue and the actions of the United States of America in reality. He recommends: "the Statue of Liberty on the East coast should be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast" (Wikipedia). In other words, the United States of America should look into the contradictions in some of its actions and the significance of its Statue of values. Interestingly, there is an inscription, a sonnet, titled "The New Colossus" (1883) written by Emma Lazarus, on the second floor of the pedestal of the Statue which reads:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridge harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
'With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

(*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2010)

This poem was written and constructed in the background of America's independence from Britain but it ignores its implications for her relationships with Africa and the Native Americans it violates. Bearing this in mind, the significance of Remi Raji's replacement of the essential features of the Statue with those of Yoruba god and goddess becomes clear. It is a deconstruction of the history and claims of America to liberty, freedom and justice.

The features of the poet's version include those of Sango, a Yoruba god of thunder and those of his faithful wife, Oya. Instead of the *stola*, the African woman wears an obviously African-designed fabric; instead of the crown with the seven spikes, she wears what appears to be Oya's traditional head gear. Again, instead of a torch, the African woman carries the *Ose* of Sango (sacred Axe of Sango) and instead of the *tabula ansata*, she carries in her left arm what appears to be Oya's insignia. It is interesting to note here that both the torch and the sacred Axe of Sango symbolise light or enlightenment. The double implications of the sacred Axe of Sango are, however, indicated in the Oriki of Sango:

I humble myself before the mysteries of Shango!
You are the owner of the Mysteries of *Thunder and Lightning*.
You are the *Wrath of God.*
You are the lord of *instant illumination.*
You are the lord of courage, boldness, fortitude.
You are the owner of the Mystery of rain

(My emphasis)

It is also significant that the poet decided to combine two Yoruba entities here: Sango and Oya. Could this possibly signify the unity between Sango and his wife, Oya, and by extension the complementary roles of the man and the woman in Yoruba world

view? According to the Yoruba tradition, Oya was the most faithful of the three wives of Sango and was said to have remained with him till the end. Some Yoruba traditions hold that "Oya … is not only the river Niger, but also a tornado" and thus is regarded as "a temperamental orisa" (Roland Hallgen, 1988:34). Also, according to Hallgen (1988), the axe of Sango is a symbol of his potency:

> The potency and force of Sango is a dominant theme in the *oriki* material and elsewhere, and the axe of Sango (his most frequent attribute), is an expression of this theme. However, this double-edge axe can also be interpreted as a symbol of harmony, with the two edges symbolizing heaven and earth and possibly his relationship to twins" (34).

This juxtaposition of icons and myths represents in a way the scars of colonial conquest and the post-colony's mask of resistance. But at the same time, it illustrates the consequences of the globalisation of cultures and how it engenders a transformation of the semantics of culture and contexts of experience.

Despite the suspicious and interrogative posturing of the poet-traveler, the fact that cross-cultural experience definitely left the subject personally and culturally altered is evident in his conversations with the various spaces and historical sites he visited. The transposition of his African consciousness into that of the alien space is illustrated in his seeing and narration of a visit to Kalamazoo on a Sunday afternoon during the summer in the company of two Americans: Katherine and Tom. There is a transfiguration of Katherine into a mermaid, the African sea goddess:

When Katherine suddenly
became a mermaid
Ridin' and rollin' down down the river
Showing us how not to drown
Ridin' and rollin' down the river
How not to become new legends
In Kalamazoo's native tales…
(18)

In Cleveland, he discovered the secret and consequences of the Middle Passage for Africa and that which represents her. He found out in the 'rock n' roll' music hall of fame that the road to such fame and immortality is death; a kind of cultural death:

In that synagogue of sounds
the road to fame is paved
With rum, dope, rage and death.
You must die first, crooner or clown

Before they roll you
to that plastic pen of praise.
(26)

Africans experienced different kinds of death. Some died on their way from Africa during the Middle Passage and could not make the journey to America while some others died tragically in the colonial plantations in the southern part of America where slave trade and slavery were rampart. The third kind of death occurred during the struggle for freedom and equality and for the right to be treated as human beings and to life. This struggle continues today as there are problems of racism and inequality as a result of which many still die either physically or through self submission to racial inferiorisation in order to have a share in the American dream. Therefore, the only way many became heroes and heroines was to die and sacrifice themselves for some cause. Thus, when the poet-tourist tries to find some "priests of pristine / melodies", he could not find them because they had all died and had been transformed in the process of glorification.

The universality of humankind and perhaps, of womanhood occurred to him at 'Seneca Falls' when in the anal of human right history he read of those women who courageously fought the patriarchal society in order to achieve equality of men and women under the law and thus paved way for the eventual right of American women to vote. Seneca Falls is the venue of the 1848 women's rights convention in New York when between one hundred and three hundred women and men sympathizers met to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of the woman and privileges that belong to them as citizens of the United States. The poet sees this historic achievement as a victory for all womenfolk, irrespective of colour or race:

I fell in love with the women at Seneca
Falls
The ones who dared, who wrote
and wrapped their names
In the sentiment of that glorious
declaration
I walked where they walked
beheld their bodies
In that corridor of history…
(36)

There is a complete identification with the feats of these noble women that the poet's uncertainty about the status of women is completely removed. He could "now

speak confidently about / motherland, foremothers, reverend / mothers and perhaps, God the Mother" (p. 36). This contact with women of another land and their struggles against oppression most likely reminded him of similar struggles against oppressive traditions and colonial subjugation in his homeland such that he sees women struggles as a universal one. His illustration of this poem with an African woman (p. 37) speaks volumes. Perhaps, it was also prefigured in his iconic transformations of the Statue of liberty earlier discussed.

Globalization is essentially characterised by plurality, contradictions and counter-narrations. While it is aimed at the universality of culture, it is also demonstrated in difference and ethnocentric consciousness. These contradictory qualities of cross-cultural relations are vividly illustrated in the poet-traveler's record of his encounters with various historical sites in America. This is seen, for instance, in his encounter with Philadelphia. The poet, "like History's child" (48), read the contradictions that America's history represented in Philadelphia. He enjoyed the hue and beauty of the historic districts of Philadelphia; the Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell and Elfreth's Alley and the warmth created by the smiling sun, which reminded him of the loveliness of Africa, so much that "All my friends thought it was an African / trip…" (p. 46):

the nice cool heat
…the sincere faces
that peopled the street of summer
Spruce and Walnut, Chestnut and Arch
Locust and Pine,

(48)

But then he discovered that something was wrong. He took in all these beauties until he 'reached Logan Square', "where Madness hung like first fruits / in the open park, in the closed souls / of harassed men" (p. 48). Although these historic sites were beautiful to behold, they also reminded him of cruelty of America towards African slaves. While on "a self-guided tour" to Rhino's café he remembered America's other side: "But I also fear your police record / against my color…" (p. 50). Here, the history of Philadelphia's racism against blacks rose like a giant wall and dammed his rapture at America's beauty.

The poet-tourist visited Williamsburg and saw both its beauty and brutality; he also saw its triumphs and tyranny:

In the open museums of your colonial
past
I heard the crude sounds of single shots
Which pacified the British train
I saw fragments of gothic romance
re-played on that Spartan stage.
(52)

These lines tell of the valour of Americans against the tyranny of colonial and imperial Britain like the 300 brave Spartans who defended their land with their lives. American soldiers fought gallantly to gain independence from Britain. America started as a haven for those seeking freedom from oppression from all over the European world. But America's house of history, these open museums, also tells of America's tyranny against African slaves whose struggles for freedom were crushed violently:

November 17, 1775… I lost the time
to the house of sermon
But my feet fastened after the Negroid
square
On set at noon was Hollywood classic
where a revolt bowed and died
before it brewed into a color riot.
(54)

There were many protests against racism, and colour segregation in America but they were usually brutally repressed. Today there are many such brutalities against blacks that America would rather not remember. For instance, blacks in America were not allowed to exercise their voting right until after protracted legal battles and civil disobedience. Even after the American's civil war when slavery had already been officially abolished, many blacks in the southern part of America were refused the freedom they were legally entitled to and many of them remained in conditions of servitude. It was in the process of the protest against these injustices and denied of civil liberty and equality that black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were assassinated. There were many ordinary black Americans whose names are not known but who perished while fighting for their rights. Particularly, in the 1800s there were cases of brutalities against blacks, especially those perpetrated by the racist organisation, Ku Klux Klan. The lynching of blacks reached an all-time high in the early 1890s.

The poet, therefore, calls attention to the double standards of American policies. While the country celebrated its freedom from Britain, it refused the blacks similar opportunity to celebrate. This history of America's oppression of black Americans was

so overwhelming that the poet and his fellow tourists could not stand the emotional trauma it caused. They wept because of the inhumanity of America against the black race:

> So real the drama in that open museum
> So real the Botswanan hated the show
> So real, awe in my heart, tears in my
> claps.
> (54)

Thus, like a page or chapter in a history book, Williamsburg is the memory house of these contradictions that make up America, the "Mother" of displaced immigrants and their oppressor too. As such, "Williamsburg is the past / which reshapes a people's future" (p. 54).

This oppressive condition and experience injustices echoes Edward Said's submission that exile, displacement and the marginality that it generates is not aesthetic or merely literary, but historical and man-made. The inequality and injustice that is part of American history could have been prevented but because of the self interest of some, it was perpetuated. Therefore, as Said notes,

> Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; that, like death but without death's mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography (2000: 174).

In the poem entitled "Jamestown" we are taken to the cover of this book of poems. The illustration used for "Jamestown" is the same as the one on the back of the text which, apart from the Statue of Liberty, consists of ships and huts in a village or rural background. According to the poet's explanations, these illustrations are representations of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its outcome in the New World. They are the "impression of the middle passage, of boats, real ships, conveying people across the ocean" (*Leadership Magazine*, 2005, pg. 45). The "pocket of huts" represents different West African Kingdoms from which people were taken into slavery in the New World and the boats and the "real ships" represent the vessels with which the slaves were carried across the Middle Passage (p. 45). These illustrations in "Jamestown" narrate the tragic historic experience of African enslavement by America. Like other negative aspects of American history that are hidden by its present glamour, the poet is

able to read this historical space and, therefore, accuses America of dubiousness and deliberate distortions of history. There is "a gap in the teeth" of American history as narrated by the landmarks and artefacts in Jamestown (p.56).

The poet then begins to list the evidence of the crimes committed in Jamestown: "the entrails of Powhatan huts and / hides"; the "weather map of that English / ship / which made the journey in 144 days / and nights, in the storms of ignorance" (p. 56). After walking through the "colonial fortress" and other sites in Jamestown and perhaps looking at racism even in today's America, the poet concludes, "*The ships were still there, waiting…*". Slavery of the blacks in America is still ongoing; the ships of oppression and enslavement are still symbolically present in the lives of the people whose existence today is hardly better than it was many years ago. There is racial discrimination and inequality in today's America. For example when the poet gets to "*Susan Constant",* the site is so history-laden that he "remembered Kunta Kinte's story" (p. 58).

Kunta Kinte's story is told by Alex Halley, a great grandson of a slave who was brought from the Gambia to America in one of the first slave ships that landed in America, in his book entitled *Root.* In this book, he narrates his ancestors' story and how he traced his ancestry to the Gambia in Africa. After several failed attempts to escape from his slave master, Kunta Kinte was eventually physically subjugated but his spirit was not. In defiance of the slave master's attempt to rename him, he decided to keep his native name, Kunta Kinte. He also decided to tell the true story of how he was kidnapped and brought to America to his daughter who also told it to her children. This way the story ran for generations until Alex Haley traced it to his great grandfather's village in the Gambia beside the *Kambi bolongo,* "the river of Gambia". The memory of this historical saga prompts the poet to search further:

So I sought the remnants of the first
Ship
Which brought the first slaves
to the first port.

I searched the corners of that museum.
From gallery to gallery
From artifact to painting, nothing but….
(58)

Unfortunately, he is unable to find any mention of this very dastardly act by the colonialists-slave traders; the history has been covered or denied. The only evidence he

finds is the defiant record of American or Jamestown wicked practice of the inhuman slave trade, and a slap on the face of the now freed black Americans:

John Pory's brilliant blasphemy:
"*Our principal wealth…consisteth in*
servants"
(58)

Incensed by this act of cover-up, the poet asks Jamestown some questions whose answers are betrayed by its boasting that its "principal wealth" was got through trade in servants, that is, slaves. The poet asks:

who worked the maize
and tobacco farms
for Virginia Company of London?
Beast or men, names or numbers
Who made the quilt that robed the land?
Who planted the profits of gold
by crude labor?
(59)

Of course, the answers are obvious. The black slaves. Therefore, Jamestown symbolises America's rotten belly; the history that America would rather not remember. The poet accuses Jamestown of hypocritical historiography: "there's a terrible gap / in the teeth of your story" (p. 59).

When the poet gets to the centre of America's political power and glamour, Washington D.C., he confesses in the poem entitled "Washington D.C." that "the Capitol was a miracle in the eye" (p. 61). He is mesmerised and enchanted by the grandeur of America, compared at least to his colonially ravished homeland, Washington D.C. was a great sight to behold. He, however, discovers that the glamour and beauty of the city is complemented by colonised African heritages. He finds in Washington's history house many African art and crafts imprisoned:

I saw Nogbaisi and his family of bronze
carvings and ornaments
lost in battles and slumber
heirlooms now abandoned
as gifts and mementoes…
of divine and bloody expeditions.
(64)

It is at this point that the poet's journey and tourism end. He must have concluded that America's master narrative is false. He decides to return home to his ancestors with his own version of the history of America. According to the poet, "my

ancestral mask beckons / from the lips of distant banks…" (p. 65) and he must return *home* to his own land.

As typical of post-colonial travelogues, Remi Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America* is a counter narrative to America's version of history. It is a form of historical revisionism which attempts to put the story of America's relationship with Africa into the correct perspective. While it is the story of the poet's travels to America and of his experiences while there, it is also obviously a loaded ethnographic record of American past and present history. It is, thus, a confirmation of the fact that history is not past only but also a present that is always in the process of being written. It is a very unique blend of the construction of self and culture. This is what ethno-autobiography does.

In the present chapter, I have examined the cultural constitution of the autobiographical poetry of two Nigerian poets: Femi Oyebode and Remi Raji- Oyelade. Femi Oyebode is understandably an exile. He has been living in the West for more than a decade. As demonstrated above, his status as an exile defined the manner in which he employed oral resources of the homeland and for what purposes. In his poems examined in this chapter, he narrates his experiences in and of the culture and politics of exile and how the memory of homeland and its culture mediate his construction of identity. On the other hand, Raji-Oyelade's collection of poem is a travelogue. As a result, his approach to the cultural space of the 'Other' is different from what is observable in Oyebode's poetry. Raji-Oyelade approaches the American space as a tourist who is on a short and temporary visit. Thus his exploration of oral resources of his homeland is counter-hegemonic as an interrogation of the master narration.

While these poets narrate their personal experiences within the geo-cultural spaces of their different sojourn, they equally narrate the stories and cultures of these spaces. Unlike the traditional notion of autobiography as essentially self- aggrandizing, these ethno-autobiographical poems are concerned with issues larger than the personal experiences of the poets; they also address issues of social, cultural and political significance. They provide very unique and enriching insights into social history.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAUGHT IN "THE POST-COLONIAL BIND OF MULTIPLE HOMELANDS": AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY IN EXILE

> It is commonplace in contemporary life that "home" becomes a nostalgic term, perhaps even replacing "community" in its emotional importance. Other factors of migration, such as poverty, war, or famine, also lead to the cultural displacement and exile associated with leaving home. (Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, 1997)

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the cultural and geographical displacement associated with the experiences of transnational migration and exile among Nigerian migrant poets. I also examine how they explore memory (both personal and collective) of the homeland and or suppress this in their bid to make sense of their crises of identity and the trauma that result from it. This act is usually done in autobiographical mode. As Deborah E Reed-Danahah (1997:125) notes, "the life history, while connected to images of "home" and of origins, has also become in the field of anthropology a search for "the past as another country". In other words, this kind of autobiography deals with issues of more than personal importance but also national and cultural. For the purpose of this study, exile poetry of Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Uche Nduka, and Olu Oguibe, are purposively selected.

The poems that are examined in this chapter, though they narrate the personal trauma of their subjects, do this with an ethnographic gaze. Therefore, I attempt to explore the cultural constitutions of these narratives and how they are autobiographically constructed in order to underscore "the tension and interplay between the individual and the social" (Alexandra Jaffe, 1997: 145) in them. This disposition is derived from what Jaffe (1997) has described as the "recognition that all writing is "writing for" (a purpose) and "writing in" (a particular social, cultural, and political framework)" (145). It can thus be argued that it is hardly possible to write the "I" in any post-colonial self narrative without including within the "I" the post-colony. The "I", therefore, becomes a representation of the collective cultural identity.

5.1 Trans-national migration and identity construction

Trans-cultural encounters between Africa and Euro-America feature struggles over identity, space and a sense of belonging. As Oha (2009:181) notes, to be "included in or excluded from the European world in which they have relocated" is an important topic in the writings of many African writers who decide to narrative their life experience in exile. These writings mostly address problems of trans-cultural relations such as alterity, racism and negotiations of space. As Oha observes, these issues are "performed in various symbolic ways" and are evident in the rhetoric of these writings. According to Oha,

> It is as if the difficulty of locating and situating the Self in the exile space provokes memory of home. In other words, the quest for a place to call home in exile brings to mind the existence of a home that has been left behind. Writing about this home that has been left behind is therefore more than nostalgia: it is also about a psychological relocation of this African home into the European. In this case, there is, within the psychology of the exiled, a conflict between homeland and other-land as texts (2009: 183).

This narration and the re-figuration of the tensions of home and exile in the poetry of Nigerian migrants are both personal and communal (Okome, 1996). In other words, they involve the excavation of the latent memory of the poet's personal experiences of the homeland and, by extension, the collective cultural and historical memory of the poet's homeland, as a post-colonial subject. This is a means of contending with the marginality and otherness that often characterise the relationship between the exile-subject and the isolating space of the metropolitan centre and exile. In "Reflection on the Territorial Integrity of Oppression", Pius Adesanmi (2004) argues that despite the noise made about globalization and the multicultural agenda in today's world, it is obvious that "the identitarian sensibilities of the contemporary subaltern subject" is defined by "the complex intermeshing of race, space, [and] geography" (53). Thus, as he further notes,

> African historicist discourses encountered epistemological territories massively overdetermined by race and raciological discourses and could only reasonably commence the deconstructive enterprise within that modality (42).

The exiled or migrant poet, in order to ascertain their identity and to create a sense of belongings, resorts to invoking memory of home as a space where they are culturally included and accepted. This is a psychological journey towards the

reconstruction of their identity as exiles or as members of a diasporic community. Therefore, the act of remembering becomes "a strategy of re-membering, of identifying and inserting a threatened selfhood within a context where the Self is welcome" (Oha 2009: 188-189).

Niyi Okunoye (2006), however, identifies two kinds of remembering of and attitude to the homeland by migrant and Diaspora writers. He describes the first attitude as the "commodification" of Africa and all that Africa represents. This is portrayed in an ambivalent disposition to the concrete realities of the homeland. Okunoye describes this attitude as the "real or emotional detachment from the homeland" by some migrant or Diaspora writers even when "all that sustains their creative engagement is the commodification of the peculiar literary practices of the same homeland" (110). Okunoye explains that this alienated homeland is appropriated by these writers for artistic interest only, whereas the homeland is seen as

> the outlandish artifact that they prepare to satisfy the literary taste of their European readership, especially when their ultimate desire is to earn a reputation in Europe. What they have in common with a writer of African origin like Ben Okri is a willingness to identify with the relics of colonial association embodied in the myth of the British Commonwealth, which the common heritage of the English language sustains (110).

This view is supported by Eckhard Breitinger (1998) in his observation that a group of younger African writers has turned their backs permanently on Africa while they are assimilated supposedly into the commonwealth of the North. According to Breitinger, these writers "reside in one of the metropolises of the North, participate in the media racket that helps to promote their writing, but still adhere to Africa as the source of their inspiration and the location in which their writings are set" (Cited in Okunoye, 2006:110). Due to the ignorance of this group of writers and their disconnection from conditions in the home country, they virtually over-romanticise the homeland such that their writings run contrary to historical facts.

Okunoye described the second attitude to Africa as that of commitment and attachment to Africa's past and traditional resources as genuine means of articulating self identification. This attitude is associated with those migrant writers who truly celebrate the original homeland instead of the adopted country. According to him, many of these writers were forced out of their home country to "seek refuge in other lands to escape political persecution" (110) because they are critics of the neo-colonial

governments at home. This group includes writers like Dennis Brutus, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Nurrudin Farah; African writers who have suffered the agony of exile because of their principled pursuit of sanity and justice in their homelands. This, however, does not imply that only those who are forced out of their countries by state persecutions are in this group. There are many writers who left home because of other reasons such as educational and economic needs but could not return because of the inclement conditions at home. Despite this condition of physical separation, these writers are emotionally attached to the homeland and sincerely wish things were better at home so that they could return. This category of writers relates to Africa with affectionate nostalgia. According to Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (1994), they have, "since independence," and more than many others like the "professional academics", "exhibited a commitment to the political cause of the masses and cultural regeneration" (Cited in Okunoye, 2006:111).

Whatever the attitude of the migrant African writer may be, Okunoye argues that these characteristics and dispositions are symptomatic of the "critical reception of cultural production in the postcolonial world" in the age of globalization. According to him, they are

> increasingly cognizant of the impact of the interrogation of conventional markers of identity such as nationality and race. The erasure of the particularizing value of distinctive identity – evidence of the growing impact of globalization– is proof that emergent markers of identity have the prospect of illuminating our understanding of the context of contemporary cultural and literary production […] The mass displacement of writers from the postcolonial world, and their westward migration have increasingly necessitated the revaluation of traditional assumptions about writers and their attachment to their original socio-cultural locations, especially as this indicates the possibility of the survival of the creative imagination of writers in the event of spatial dislocation from the homeland (2006: 109).

In a study of the writings of Pan-Mayan exile writers, Kay Warren (1997) explored the relationship between the representation of the individual and the collective experiences of the people in the writers' life histories. He examined the ways the marginalised Mayan groups represent themselves and interrogate the power structures that define their existence. Through his reading of the writings of the Pan-Mayan exile writer, Victor Montenjo, Warren underscores the intercultural nature of exilic writings. He draws attention to how this particular writer's work amplifies and empowers the

"subaltern voices through the *testimonio* genre- in order to describe the violence and existential dilemmas of Guatemala" (23). Warren argues that this form of writing is engaging and interrogative because it portrays "a world of 'contact zone', social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (23). He, therefore, describes Montenjo's writings as accounts which "take the readers on a personal journey of violence, displacement, and cultural renewal" such that "from the safety and free speech of exile, he was able to criticize state terrorism directly" (26). The *testimonio* is both a personal and collective story of struggles and culture. According to Warren, it is a

> […] generally linear first person narration of socially and collectively significant experiences, in which the narrative voice is that of a typical or extraordinary witness or groups that have lived through other, similar situations or the circumstances which induce them. By the virtue of its collective representativeness, *testimonio* is overtly or not, an intertextual dialogue of voices, reproducing but also creatively reordering historical events in a way which impresses as representative and true and which projects a vision of life and society in need of transformation (23).

Generally speaking, displaced and exilic writers make attempts, either overtly or covertly, to give voice to their own experiences as well as the collective experiences of their people and by so doing rupture those cultural and social-political barriers that have marginalised them and positioned them in unequal social relations. Migrant writers, like anyone who occupies a restricted and restricting space, have always sought to reorganise themselves and reconstruct their identities by subverting hegemonic constructions of them and then create alternative representations that secure their true sense of being. This is usually done through the evocation and excavation of those memories that have remained latent as a result of distance from their domain of reference. As Birgitta Svensson (1997) notes,

> In modern society, every individual must create his self with the aid of his individual ability to link his past to the future. One's personal cultural competence is then decisive for who one becomes, the identity one acquires (91).

Therefore, the reflexive writing of the self is essentially emancipatory. This is the politics of self representation. How then do the social and/or political pressures piled on the migrant and exile writers, as minority or marginal subjects, to authenticate themselves culturally conflict with the complexity of the multiple and shifting identities

that form the dynamics of contemporary globalised existence? In what sense have these infused the personal experience with the collective, the self with culture? These are the issues that are explored in this chapter.

5.2 Post-colonial travelogue and the re/writing of the self and the homeland in Odia Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems*

Odia Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems*, like Remi Raji's *Shuttlesongs: America*, is a post-colonial poetic travelogue. Therefore, like the former, it is also interrogative like all counter-discourse. As Maria Lopez Ropero (2003) observes, post-colonial travel accounts are essentially aimed at "decentring" Western culture and at creating a feeling of guilt over Europe's colonial past (53). She argues that there has been a shift in the role of travel writing from the former use as vehicle of cultural prejudice to "instrument of cultural critique" (53). This quality properly describes the temper of contemporary African migrant and travel writings.

While *London Letter* narrates the experiences of the poetic persona during a trip to London, it also addresses how the poet persona's encounters with the geo-cultural space of London awaken his memory of his own city of Lagos. Therefore, essentially, it is a comparison of two cities, a tale of two cities. This narrative plays greatly on the physical landscapes of the two cities. As such its preoccupation with both the mindscape of the poet and the physical landscape of the cities demonstrates cultural constitution of a travelogue. This also confirms what critics have described as the personal and social awareness aspects of contemporary travel writings. It is observed that the act of traveling in a contemporary travelogue spring from a personal need for change and more. According to Barbara Korte (2000), the most important motivation is self enhancement whereas the travel destination and world often serves as "backdrop for the traveler's very personal concern" (144). Holland and Huggan (1998) describe it as a quest for self-understanding and apprehension which reveals "a conflicted sense of belonging and allegiance" (14). Alongside this personal search and subject-orientation of travel writings is its preoccupation with the culture and geography of the traveler's destination. According to Maria Lopez (2003), this combination

> […] becomes more cohesive if we bear in mind that the personal urge to travel may respond, as we will see, to an attempt to solve some inner conflicts whose examination entails delving into broader socio-historical issues. The foregrounding of the traveler's subjectivity, together with the awakening of social consciousness, are therefore, the two most prominent features of contemporary travel writing (53).

To the post-colonial African writer, travel writings are active instrument for decentring the colonial metropole and redefining both the postcolonial Self and the postcolony, thereby enabling a new self-understanding. Oha (2009) describes this decentring of the colonial metropolis as the "'Third Worlding' of Europe" and the "transformative presencing of the Third World in the European space – within the domain of literature" (181). According to him,

> The writing of Africa in Europe, by which is meant the representation of Africa, the re-creation of African cultural aesthetics and rhetorical practices, as well as the representation of Africa as a text performed within the European context, is a crucial issue especially at a time when the pressure to escape to Europe has increased in African countries (182).

Babara Korte (2000) also observes that postcolonial writers of travelogues characteristically infused their writings with issues of identity and belonging that permeate postcolonial writing generally. She argues that to these postcolonial travelers, the need to define "one's home still seems to be more urgent than for other travelers, and the search for a home may even be their primary motive for travel" (170).

Odia Ofeimun was born in Iruekpen-Ekuma, Nigeria, in 1950. He worked as a news reporter, factory labourer and civil servant before studying Political Science at the University of Ibadan, where his poetry won first prize in the University Competition of 1975. Ofeimun has worked as an administrative officer in the Federal Public Service Commission, as a teacher, as Private (Political) Secretary to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Unity Party of Nigeria (Okunoye 2006), and as a member of the editorial board of *The Guardian Newspapers* in Lagos. Odia Ofeimun travelled to London and sojourned briefly at the University of Oxford. He returned to Nigerian in 1993, after the annulment of the general election by General Babangida's military government.

According to Okunoye (2006), this brief stay at Oxford provided him with an opportunity to conduct research for the writing of the biography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo whose private secretary he was during the former's lifetime. It was this experience of London and Oxford that inspired the poems in *London Letter and Other*

poems. Other published collections poetry by Odia Ofeimun include *The Poet Lied* (1980), *A Handle For The Flutist* (1986), *Dreams At Work* (2000). His poems for dance drama, *Under African Skies* (1990) and *Siye Goli* (*A Feast Of Return* – 1992), both of which engage themes across African and South African history, were commissioned and performed across Britain and Western Europe by Adzido, the London-based Pan-African Dance Ensemble in the early nineties. Odia Ofeimun is a proud Lagosian, and keen watcher of the "citiness of cities", he wrote the primary text for the coffee table book, *Lagos, A City At Work* and has edited two themed anthologies of poetry including *Lagos Of The Poets*, on the city of Lagos, and *Salute To The Master Builder*, on the personage of Obafemi Awolowo. This background shows the centrality of Lagos in cultural psyche of the poet.

In *London Letter and Other Poems,* Odia Ofeimun takes up issues of self-apprehension, and re-identification as defined by the dynamics of contemporary transnational and trans-cultural relations. He addresses these as represented in and occasioned by past and current relationships between his homeland, Nigeria, and the former colonial master, Britain, here represented by Lagos and London. By juxtaposing these cities, Odia Ofeimun dialogues, as a postcolonial subject, with the essence of his historical and cultural connections to the two spaces and interrogates these relationships as they affect or define his identity. This relationship provides for him the opportunity to address the important themes of home, exile, belonging, identity and the challenges of neo-colonialism. For this purpose, he represents Britain and Nigeria with two important cities in these countries – London and Lagos. These cities serve as his dialogic trope on the historic encounters between Nigeria and Britain and the consequences of these encounters.

5.2.1 Space, place, and memory

The relationship between these cities and how they define the consciousness of the poet is expressed in the following juxtaposition of the social-political landscapes of the geo-spaces:

> *Na London we dey* pooling vast memories
> Across the Atlantic, we witness
> The red bus careering towards Marbel Arch
> So free from the swarm and crush of Lagos
> The sweated journey turned to a fiasco
> Fiercer than war of democracy.

> *We de for London*, spooling our best wishes
> in strands of rueful remembrance—*the god*
> *Of bolekajas* packing bins upon human cattle
> To redress crowded bus-stop
> ("London Letter I," 14).

The poet expresses the ubiquitous memory of the socio-political realities of Lagos and how this memory is provoked by his sighting of London. He also addresses the condition of migrants' existence within the cosmopolitan space of London. The sight of London brings back the memory of the colonial encounter and how that encounter influenced the post-colonial condition of Nigeria. As Niyi Okunoye (2006) observes,

> Lagos and London, which function superficially in the work as opposing spatial designations of the homeland and the colonial mother country respectively, consequently emerge as collaborators in shaping a unique identity that the poet-persona, as a postcolonial writer shares with others in the in-between space (107).

According to the poet, Nigerian migrants to London deliberately ignore the history of colonial encounter between London and Lagos and the fact that the London of the twentieth century is not a paradise: "…so consummately," the migrants "forget / unadjusted lives in Thatcher's clockwork orange –the peace of vagrants as truly homeless / as compatriots in my city by the lagoon –" ('London Letter II' 15). The London of today is as challenging as the Lagos of the former British colony, "my city by the lagoon". There are also "unadjusted lives"/ "vagrants" and the "homeless" who are native born of London, / "hopeless as truth at Hyde Park" in Britain's London just as there are in Nigeria's Lagos. As such, London is no longer the capital of an empire but an ordinary city like Lagos with its burdens of human and economic challenges. These migrants chose not to see the ugly landscapes of the twentieth century London. Because of what they hope to achieve or get from London, they decide to "self-assuredly" pool

> … scraps of ancient ditties
> To ward off reality.
> …fellow countrymen interpreting Jim Crow
> Saving London from London's filth, sick city falling
> Artlessly beggaring my city by the lagoon
> ('London Letter III' 15)

These migrant countrymen of the poet persona live in London in a manner that they would never dare to live at home. As they do at Mushin and Aguda in Lagos, these countrymen pretend to be enjoying in London. As Fela Anikulapo sang, they are

[…] shuffering and shmiling [in] Jungle city
Abandoned to muck, nightsoil and cadavers
Abandoned to Generals and tycoons of loots
Sinking unseeing eyeball into reckless eyeballing
Where countryman proves the beaded dignity of labour
Is not like charity that must begin at home.
(‘London Letter III’ 16).

In a demystifying sarcasm, the poet persona describes London’s ironic splendour that his migrant countrymen are dying to share. Comparing London’s landscape with that of Lagos, the poet wonders why anyone should leave Lagos for London. In a series of comparisons the poet paints the two geo-spaces catching on his visits to various places in London such as Marble Arch (p. 14), Hyde Park (p. 15), Oxford Street (p. 15), Victoria Station (p. 16), Peckham and Brixton (p. 16) and his memories of Lagos which is represented by places such as Mushin, and Aguda (p. 16). At Marble Arch the transport system is so good and smooth that he remembers the chaos that characterises Lagos traffic:

the red bus careering towards Marble Arch
so free from the swam and crush of Lagos
the sweated journey turned to a fiasco
fearcer than the war of democracy
(14)

He describes the transport system in Lagos in the form of “*the god of bolekajas* parking bins upon human cattle / to redress crowded busstops;” (p. 14). The term “*bolekajas*” is Lagos’s name for transport buses. Most of these buses are so rickety and crowded that passengers are packed like cattle and because there is shortage of buses to carry passengers at the “crowded bus stops passengers are packed along with loads. A typical *bolekaja* bus had its seats made of planks and were arranged in such a manner that passengers sat backing where he was going.

The poet compares Peckham and Brixton in London with Mushin and Aguda areas in Lagos and paints Lagos’ rot and deprivations. At Mushin and Aguda, the people endure so much pain and deprivations as they go through their daily grind. He describes these places as the typical social and physical landscapes of Lagos; he describes Lagos as a

Shuffering and shmiling jungle city
Abandoned to muck, nightsoil and cadavers
Abandoned to Generals and tycoons of loots
(16)

Cadavers above refers to dead bodies that are scattered on the roads of the city of Lagos which has been taken over by retired Generals and money "miss roads" who care less about the condition of the city. The only thing that is of interest to them is how to loot public money. "Money miss roads" is a term used to describe those who flaunt their wealth rudely in the face of others and behave as if they are the lord of the land.

On another page, the poet does not see much difference between the London he visited and Lagos. He sees rot and chaos in both cities:

> Ah! *For this London,* we pay as we peel
> The gloss and rhythm in a tale of two cities
> Coalescing in the snakes and ladders of the mind
> Where broken lifts in undergrounds, clockwork trains
> Playing battering rams in head-collisions
> Emulate the dry taps and blackouts of my city by the lagoon
> ('London Letter VI' 19)

In the last stanza of the poem, the poet-narrator confesses that life in London is far from being rosy. The migrants only deceive themselves by thinking that living in London is a symbol of high life or a sign of affluence. In fact, living in London is traumatic:

> Like them who sang *'Lagos na so so enjoyment'*
> *We dey for London like we no dey at all*
> Dreading the winter like the old woman the nights
> Without firewood to hold harmattan at bay
> *We dey for London like we no dey at all*
> Chewing cud in the birth of freedom as tragedy
> A used up hope mocking the human condition
> On the sides of the Atlantic: *Na so so enjoyment.*
> ('London Letter VII' 20)

5.2.2 Return to native land and a journey of self discovery

This poem is a historical and cultural representation of both Lagos and London. It is more of cultural coming to terms with a history that plays a very important role in what the poet is and what his migrant countrymen have become. It is an excursion into the cultural past, the present and a possible future. *London Letter* is autobiographical because it is an eye witness account. That the poet-narrator is part of these experiences is shown in the use of the collective pronouns "we" and "our". Apart from narrating his eye-witnessing of the experiences of the migrants, the poet also interrogates the history of Nigeria as a former colony of Britain. He explains that the current status of Nigeria and Nigerian migrants is the consequence of this historic encounter. This disposition to

the colonial experience and London and the duality of the narrative demonstrate what Lopez has described as "*countertravel writing*" which narrates personal experiences, engages in subjectivity and delves into "socio-historical issues" (53). He describes this as "the awakening of social consciousness" (53). These qualities define its ethnography and form the preoccupations of the work. In the blurb of the collection, the poet is described to have brought together the personal and the socio-cultural by pressing "personal biography and family history into a lyrical engagement with Africa's collective memories". Beyond these personal and national and racial concerns, he also seeks to achieve "a common morality that cuts across different geographies and histories".

The ethnographic quality of *London Letter* is equally demonstrated in the poet's employment of the Nigerian Pidgin English. Okunoye describes this as the ambivalent appropriation of "the colonial Self and the nativist Other" (113). The complexity of this history and the identity conflict that it provokes is also evident in the attitude of the poet persona to both Lagos (the homeland) and London (representing the culture of the colonial center). While he criticises the homeland, he does not, however, celebrate the 'colonial motherland'.

The crisis of identity that is common to migrants who attempt to subsist within a foreign domain is further shown in 'Giagbone', in which the poet-narrator adopts a typical oral resource and a surreal atmosphere to portray his journey of self-discovery. This occurs through a gradual coming to grips with his ancestral background and history as represented by his father's face and eyes. Reminiscent of Femi Oyebode's *Naked to Your Softness and Other Dreams* (1989), the poet travels spiritually from a state of arrogant self-assurance to a state of true historical and spiritual awareness and self-apprehension which results in his return to dignity and authenticity that his father represents.

'Giagbone' is divided into six parts each revealing different levels of awareness. In the first stanza of the first part, the poet-narrator explains:

> I meet my father's face in every mirror,
> Every chrome, and shines in the mall….
> I lounge in the sasswood of his eyes
> Hallowed by black knots and brown shoots
> Ingrowing and willing my heart
> With a thousand trials by ordeal
> To reach out, out to the sun
> Away from lands overtaken by winter
>
> (21)

In this stanza the poet-narrator is taken for a stray traveller who left the safety of home, "the sun" and gets stuck in the "lands overtaken by winter", which here represent Nigeria and London, respectively. Though lured away from "the sun" by the "mirror", "chrome" and the shining "mall" of London, his father's face haunts him, "willing" his "heart / with a thousand trials by ordeal / to reach out" for home, "the sun". Despite his stubborn resistance to his father's wishes and ancient wisdom, he continues to encounter his ubiquitous father's face everywhere he goes. The face reminds him of his cultural history, his people and ancestors:

> …everywhere,
> His pupils burning out my pupils
> Smarting with the scalding smoke
> Of the long guns announcing his return
> - the return of elders – to a truer home
> Beyond Alxeimer's wreckage and prized rags
> Beyond unmended fences and brave futures
> Stretched from doorstep to street's end
> At the end of a man's daylight
>
> (22)

Since the poet is a traveler whose experience consists in the eye witnessing of the collective experience of Nigerian migrants, it can be said that his journey of self-discovery is representative and typical of the experience of Nigerian migrants to London.

From part II of the poem to part VI, his father's face grows powerful and steady. It changes from a bland face to eyes. This also may suggest the poet-narrator's gradual awareness of his cultural heritage and wisdom. He becomes more and more attentive to his father as he journeys from one stage of self-apprehension to another. He even begins to understand what the eyes say:

> I meet my father's eyes now
> -a steady gaze that melted nuts,
> Bolts and screws into a healer's art
> -a faith, washed in petrol and engine oil
> In praise of Ogun, god of iron and roads
>
> (23)

From this point on, he begins to understand his father's perspective and becomes more sensitive to his concerns. In stanza two of part II, he meets his "father's eyes in dire humour / of seasons scapped by the clatter of empty tills; / a clatter he rued from days that saw / his lories hurtling down …" (lines 1–4, p. 23). This possibly suggests his father's occupation. A driver? In stanza three, he meets his "father's eyes in suspended

disbelief / lapping my childhood knowledge of bad faith / in adult worlds and brave futures" (lines 1–3). By the time we get to part III of the poem, the poet-narrator has become deliberate in his probation of his father's eyes. He now accepts his father's knowledge and wisdom and decides to view London through these more ancient eyes; he becomes aware of the true identity and worth of London. In stanza one of this part, he "scours" with his father's eyes:

> The speed-bled faces of Londoners
> Whose skies have lowered their eyelids
> In search of a heaven that the hand can grasp
> In thrall to a vision that the horizon has tamed
> With winds that harden winter masks
> And masks that harden wayward winds
> In travelling anxieties stocking Europe's season…
> And the duel rotting apples
> Occluding anomie
> In the ravaged South of my heart
>
> (25)

Scouring here implies a deliberate investigation. The poet's employment of the metaphor of "the father" and the "father's eyes" is actually very instructive. This perhaps underscores Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, an innate consciousness that is defined, in this case, by collective history and memory and which is subsumed in individual members' sub-conscious. It may also represent what Paul Durbin has described as the "memory passed on by our heritage", the history of the ancestors, which "include [s] their experiences and emotions". When the migrant is pressed by unsavoury situations he is forced to pay attention to culture and consciousness of the homeland which were initially occluded by the delusion of a paradisal life in the foreign land. According to Durbin, this disposition is explained by the man's "innate tendency" to respond in certain ways, especially when our experiences "stimulate an inherited predisposition toward action" (Par. 12). As such the "father" and "the father's eyes" are metaphors of the migrant's latent memory of his cultural heritage and the nationalistic direction that the history of this culture points, especially as it concerns the relationships between Nigeria and Britain.

In actual situations, this theory is problematic in its nativist and essentialist tendency. An uncritical acceptance of such historical perspective and cultural essentialism poses a challenge, especially when the ancestors are as guilty as the coloniser in the exploitation and abuse of the homeland, a condition which encourages

migration in the first place and surely complicates the migrant's disposition to the homeland.

In part IV of 'Giagbone', the poet-narrator achieves a clearer self-understanding and re-connects to his ancestral homeland. From scouring through his father's eyes, he graduates to the point of 'seeing' with his father's eyes as he accepts and embraces fully the culture and history of his people. In stanza one, he writes:

> I see with my father's eyes and I am forced
> To embrace the pagan distrust of his silence
> Visions contesting my brow with wrinkles
> Furrowing my forward gaze with question marks
>
> (27)

This new knowledge of his past halts his blind acceptance of the colonial and metropolitan version of history. It makes him ask questions, "furrowing" his "forward gaze with question marks". He sees with his father's eyes and "mourn with him the murky days of rain / chased by lightning through religions of the till / harried by sour grapes," when the colonialist exploited his homeland and rejoiced in "the bitter troughs of the Pound / in the seething hyperreality of Europe's in–gathering...." ('Giagbone' IV, stanza 2, lines 2–4, p.27). This enables him to evaluate his migratory experience and to conclude that it is the colonial metropolis that benefits most from his nomadic existence. The word "nomad" as used here implies the poet's traveler/migratory status and that of his countrymen. In the hyper–reality of Europe's harvest from and exploitation of her neo–colonies, her "in–gathering" results in the "regress" of the migrants:

> Matching the native's progress to my nomad's regress
> Hoarding apostrophes of home that exile makes
> With fugitive pleasures retrenching
> The blindness of choice that goads me
> Strict with the discipline of a suicide
>
> (27)

In lines 6 and 7 of stanza II of part IV, there is a juxtaposition of the personal and collective experiences of the migrants and their new abode. It also shows that the benefit of the relationship between these migrants and the foreign space is unequal. "Matching my nomads' regress to the natives' progress" (line 6) suggests that the natives of London, who represent the host community, were the ones that benefit from the relationship. The "nomads" in the plural form represents the Nigerian migrants or the poet's countrymen in London who "regress" while the "natives", also in the plural form, "progress". This shows a collective experience both on the part of the migrants

and the host. In line 7, the poet–narrator underscores the individual level of the experience of migration and exile. In this case, he matches "the native's progress" ("native" in the singular form connotes individual Londoners) with his personal regress: "to my nomad's regress". The poet thus demonstrates, as earlier noted, that the status of the migrant is the product of a collective history and experience which consist of the colonial and post-colonial encounters between the homeland, Nigeria, and Britain. Therefore, the migrant's identity is only authenticated when there is a meaningful and deliberate interrogation and articulation of these multiple histories and shifting identities. This is expressed in part V and stanza I:

I let my father's sadness overtake me
On every neo-sign and starboard
I let his laughter lines over-etch my smile
In groundings with homeless natives
Lost to the random commune of charities,
The grudging welfare murking undergrounds
With empathy that knows not
The back street that I walk

(28)

In stanza two, the poet persona yields: "I let my father's sadness become me / […]. I let his reason splay shoes / sole–less on the front of Brixton / where the empires of my heart / rise to strike for the futures / that other people's dreams overtake" (lines 5-9). In stanza three, he submits:

I let my father's sadness reprieve me
For the muffled marches of the day
Whose banners, trodden under hooves,
Still rise screaming through winter fog
With the coal-miners' cry of those
Who did not ask to be colonized:
Those in pits closed to madding hordes
And those who will not blink at the takeover
Of those who took over the world.

(29)

There is a clear understanding here of the evil of colonialism and the impoverishment of the people by the power brokers. These 'colonised' and underpaid but overused labourers do not mind the collapse of the empire that enslaves them. Finally, in the last part of this poem, 'Giagbone', the poet–narrator reconciles with his father and comes to terms with the historical memory of his people. He looks his father in the face, and they share a mutual understanding and love, and relief as his "…father's face" exhales "a hemp of love's accusation". What is the accusation? It is the

-distances that keep me voyaging….
-the loss that dogs me with his shadows…
And the demands that he never made
Forever staking closed borders
To tie the 'wanderer' down
(29)

As he admits his careless and ignorant dispositions to the homeland, his father tries to rid him of the demons that keep him wandering endlessly, and have continued to create a chasm between him and true self-apprehension. By this, his father gives him the opportunity "…to be his father's son" again (p. 29). Eventually, the traveler comes to terms with their past without which the present and the future can only at best be nebulous.

London Letter depicts the social and cultural engagements of Nigerian postcolonial travel writings. It demonstrates the cultural constitution of the text and portrays it more than a mere gratification of the authorial self but as a critique of the understanding of that self and the socio-historical moments that define it. *London Letter* is an ethno-autobiography; it narrates the poet's self awareness and cultural awareness. It is also an eye witness account of the lives of some Nigerian migrants in London. This makes it a narrative within a narrative. Through this narrative mode and the preoccupation with socio-cultural contexts of the migrants' experiences, its ethno-autobiographical quality is underscored.

By decentering the former colonial metropolis and peripheralising it as the new 'Other', there is a re/writing of history and a reconstruction of the 'Self' in opposition to the colonial representation of the post-colony.

5.3 Space and marginality: exile and reconstruction of self and homeland in the poetry of Olu Oguibe, Uche Nduka, and Tanure Ojaide

In an article entitled "'Occupying the Isolated Terminal Space and Silent': The Rhetoric of Inclusion and Exclusion in the Poetry of Femi Oyebode" (2009), Oha describes the complex activities and dialogue that characterise the psyche of the exile writer in the contemporary world. It underscores the confusion and challenges that define the attempts to make sense of the dislocations and displacement that exile or inevitable migration engendered today. This is irrespective of whether the migration or exile is voluntary or forced. According to Oha,

> It is as if the difficulty of locating and situating the Self in the exile space provokes memory of home. In other words, the quest for a place to call home in exile brings to mind the existence of a home that has been left behind. Writing about this home that has been left behind is therefore more than nostalgia: it is also about a psychological relocation of this African home into the European. (183)

There is the problem of relationship between the migrant and the homeland that is left behind. While in some situations the memory of this homeland is deeply nostalgic, this nostalgia is also laced with bitterness created by the memory of the factors that necessitate the migration in the first place. Separation from home is painful and traumatic experience which, according to Edward Said, amounts to one being treated or feeling like an outcast. Said describes exile as "one of the saddest fates." It is like being banished from the society. According to him, an exile is like an outcast excluded from the life of the community; always uncomfortable at home and at odds with the environment. They are "inconsolable about the past, bitter about the present and the future." (1994: 47). In some ways, the experience of exile is associated with the idea and terrors of being a leper, a social and moral untouchable.

In an effort to soothe this pain and to bring the homeland closer, the exile re-invents the homeland in certain ways and tries to re-situate themselves within this fabricated homeland. This has often proved very difficult if not impossible. As Oha noted above, writing about this experience is more than a mere romanticisation of the homeland, "it is also about a psychological relocation of this African home into the European" (2009: 183). Thus, as Lahens notes, there is a sense of uncertainty about exile as the subject is permanently uprooted, neither here nor there but constantly on the move. The exile is "at the same time inside and outside, settled in the insecurity of a painful and uneasy situation" and the "contradictory movements which cut through it only became shaper, nourishing a permanent oscillation between anchorage and flight" (1992:736).

5.3.1 Space, isolation and identity crisis in Oguibe's *Songs of exile*

The anxiety, restlessness and confusion that exile provokes, as described above, is manifested by Olu Oguibe in a draft verse in which he reveals his desire to lay claim to every space he occupies while at the same time acknowledging that the attempt is a mere fantasy. He writes like a thirsty and lost traveler in a desert who is already experiencing hallucination and tries to impose some order upon their mind by laying claim to every transient memory and vision that crosses their mindscape:

With great promiscuity I have staked my claims
I have sown my seeds in every field
And built my house in every land
I have made every continent my home
And I shall sing the beauty of all women and men
and proclaim the grandeur of all that nature has made
I belong to all nations, I declare
I belong to all
I belong to you.

According to Oguibe, this poem was written about Mexico City on a visit to the city. In the poem, he betrays the displacement and dislocation that characterise the life of an exile. There is a perpetual search for a place that can be settled, a kind of home. Like a thirsty traveler in the desert, every place that gives the promise of comfort becomes a possible 'home'. Therefore when the poet got to Mexico City he becomes keenly aware of his homelessness and wished he could set up a home in the city. But as he admits later, the desire is a mere fantasy and a betrayal of the rootlessness that becomes the experience of an exile. Commenting on the poem, he explains:

> It is not exactly great poetry (which is why I prefer to refer to it as verse rather than a poem), but more significantly, the fantasy of a home in Mexico or wherever else I have entertained such fantasy about in the past, and the utopia of the whole world as home, both speak to loss and longing, the yearning for a home. Though made on different occasions on different trips, these notes and sketchbook entries speak to the same issue, which is the exile's eternal struggle with place and belonging. In my recent essay on "Exile and the Creative Imagination" I speak of the exile's constant effort to rebuild what is lost, but I also state that this effort mostly manifests either as melancholic nostalgia or as propositions, as projections into the future, as "plans" that can only find space in what I call the "free republic of the imagination" where all things are possible. Icamole House, like the home in the world, manifests the imaginative crutches that lever the exile out of the existential morass of un-belonging and regret.

This submission by Olu Oguibe characterises the temper of his exile poems. The poet writes with a deep sense of loss and alienation, which betrays a feeling of entrapment. He attempts to manage this condition by excavating memories that are meant to reconnect him with the homeland that is left behind in his search for a suitable home away from home. For instance, the introductory essay to his book-length poem, *A Song from Exile* (1990) describes the poet's feelings of anger, shame, and despair at being away from home and describes it as a kind of deformity. He laments that his exile,

though voluntary, is like the severance of a child from the umbilical cord of the mother thereby leaving him bereft of his creative soul and wholeness:

> Tongue is blunt.
> The songster has journeyed
> without his voice (9).

He feels that leaving home, though under the guise of academic necessity, amounts to cowardice and betrayal: "A coward fled home and / the battle front" (p. 9). He, therefore, sees his life away from the homeland as a form of dislocation. He compares it to making one's bed with thorns as there is no comfort whatsoever derived from the flight from home:

> My bed with a quilt of thorns
> Ah, conscience that leashes to his past
> Conscience that stake a man in the open courtyard
> And pelts him with rain
> (13).

To the poet, leaving home is like making a journey from fertility to aridity. It is like embarking on a journey "ways from the sea into / the desert". In the poem entitled "Letter to His Mother," the poet describes the precariousness and the dilemma of leaving home and living in exile. He describes it as constant struggles and an experience that leaves one groping for meaning and order because exile could be chaotic. In the poem, he describes his double consciousness and the crisis of identity that it generates:

> My soul is a dumb of Black
> earth sitting on water, but
> how long can it last? how long
> can the donkey bear its load?
> (13)

Exile and prolonged separation from familiar experiences and places at some point result in the erosion of what is known and uncertainty then sets in. This condition and the anxiety that it causes are described by Yanick Lahens (1992) in his article entitled "Exile: Between Writing and Place" when he explains that the uncertainty and fear of the exile is the result of the threat of possible dissolution and loss of a known self. According to Lahens,

> It may seem the height of folly to speak of exile and wandering while this earth is menaced more than ever. But perhaps it is precisely because the earth is giving way beneath our feet, because it holds us up less and less that we must formulate this anguish which rips through our being, speak our obsessive fear of dilution, of the apocalypse, in order to conjure it up by it

> first. For us it is not a question of exalting elsewhere on pain of total dispossession nor of exacerbating withdrawal on pain of confinement and certain death, but of leaving withdrawal behind without losing oneself in elsewhere. The search for a new center of gravity, for a new point of equilibrium, is certainly one of the major stakes of the moment (737).

It is this sentiment that Oguibe expresses when he laments that exile can actually be as cruel as death and self dissolution. This, however, happens very slowly, in an almost imperceptible manner:

> Slowly, the insider crumbles piece by piece
> grain by grain
> floating away in the
> dark, green sea
> sinking
> with
> time.
>
> ('Letters to His Mother', lines 19-30).

This fear of loss of identity and the possibility of self dissolution is graphically expressed in lines 31- 43 of the poem where the poet persona betrays a loss of clear connection to his past and authentic self. According to the poet, prolonged separation from home can result in complete disconnection from all that is familiar and lead to forgetfulness of who one was. For instance, in this poem, the poet seems to have forgotten his name, which in traditional Yoruba sense represents a person's identity like one's *Oriki* (Yoruba panegyric poem) :

> do I remember my name?
> i remember my name.
> A word in two syllables.
> Silent as a stab.
> And my country.
> i remember
> faces
> and
> snatches
> of what once was.
> memory stammers.
> nothing remains
> but a two-inch scar.
>
> ("Letters to His Mother", lines 31- 43).

One of the ways the poet tries to keep the home close to his heart is by taking with him pictures of loved ones. These pictures become memorabilia and symbols of the home that is left behind. For example, he keeps his mother's pictures to remind him of

his roots. However, after a long physical separation from home and these loved ones, he realises that not even the picture of his mother is sufficient to reconnect him to this roots and the true idea of himself which has begun to slip from his grip or to awaken his memory of his country. Everything seems to be fading, disappearing; even his mind to be blank and he begins to doubt who he "was". He begins to show a serious symptom of identity crises. The poet, therefore, laments:

> i carry your pictures still
> but what is there in pictures?
> the mind is the only picture.
> the mind is a crump
> led photograph
> fading at the edges
> fading, aging
> slowly gathering dust.
>
> (Oguibe, *Letters to His Mother*, lines 52-58).

This is very significant because it reveals the inner state of the poet and raises a question about the supposed comfort of exile. The poet expresses in these lines how separation and a long distance from home can result in problems of self apprehension and schizophrenia. In fact the poet here is aware of how his exposure to the new cultural environment of exile erodes his personality. He acknowledges that one's identity is the product of one's environment, relationships and cultural orientations. Now that he is separated from all that once were familiar and is exposed to new realities he begins to notice how the old consciousness fades away. Even the picture of his mother does generate a graphic memory of home; the mind which should hold this memory is also, like "crumpled photograph", losing clarity and vividness. It is "fading at the edges / fading, aging / slowly gathering dust". This condition is explained by Sophia Lehmann (1998) as follows:

> The paradox of assimilation is that it tends to exacerbate rather than alleviate the sense of marginality for which it was supposed to be the cure […]. In casting off or repressing one's "tribal" affiliation, one also loses a sense of roots – of history and tradition (103).

In another instance, the poet acknowledges this sentiment in his description of the indeterminacy of the exile. He accepts the fact that there is not a true way one can forget the past or truly disown one's history and identity. All attempts are just attempts and they have always resulted in more pain and complications. He expresses this understanding in his essay entitled "Exile and the Creative Imagination" :

> Exile persists and its persistence speaks to the resilience and relevance of geography. It also underlines the inescapable desirability of belonging. It may be questioned, even ridiculed but only those who have experienced the loss of home can understand the rootlessness—and ruthlessness—of existence in the shiftless, treacherous territory of exile (Oguibe, 2005: 16).

This implies that one of the ways an exile deals with the influence and pressures of exile is a longing for the home they left behind and all the positive things that the home represents. It is certainly impossible for them to maintain the state of mind they used to have; exile changes them forever. Thus, as Oguibe notes above, this sense of irreparable loss is ruthless and frightening. Hybridity results in eventual syncretism and a perpetual sense of identity crisis. This, however, does not mean that living in the homeland is easy or better. Those who stay at home experience a different kind of trauma; they live in a psychological loneliness and suffer from an agonizing form of alienation: alienation from the self. Therefore, either at home or in exile, people suffer some kind exile.

5.3.2 Cultural space, hybridity and the crisis of African imagination

While addressing the impact of separation and disconnection of the exile from the reality of the homeland, Niyi Osundare (2010), in an interview, described the three stages of relationship to the homeland culturally, socially and politically. He describes these stages as, (1) "the bleeding stage", (2) the stage of "incipient denial and incipient rationalization", and (3) the stage of "complete denial and complete rationalization." According to Osundare, what makes a writer is more than mere access to publishers and funds which are the main advantages of the writers in exile. The writer is made by the consciousness of the root with which they are identified:

> What makes a writer is the nitty-gritty of experience, the flavour of the local flower, the smell of the soil, the rustle of harmattan leaves in the dry season, the rustling of the river in its valley,…the flatulence of the African politician, his or her lies, the enduring wisdom in indigenous idioms and proverbs. These are the areas that really constitute the subjects that we write about. But that's not all; the beauty of the local festival, the jiggling of the well-shaped hips of the dancer, the tingling in the biceps of the drummer, the beauty of the songs, the history that they tell and the memory they evoke, and the way they define us as human beings who live in culture, not just outside it, who live within a certain grid of values, of morals, of perceptions, of philosophy, the things we know and how we come to know them.

> These are things that constantly impinge on literature. The food we eat, the flavour of the food, the way the food is prepared, the smell, the water we drink, good water is supposed to be colourless, but in Nigeria our water has colour. Why does it happen that way? (*The Nation Newspaper*, December 26, 2010).

Olu Oguibe's attempt to reconnect with the homeland, as he demonstrates in his subsequent poems, is very tragic in its disconsolation and pains. He remembers the homeland but in dark memories. In the poem, 'I Am Bound To This Land By Blood", he remembers his connection to the homeland and attempts to reclaim the tie he has with it. In the first stanza of the poem, he expresses the basis of his relationship with the homeland as that of blood relationship. He argues that he is connected to African and particularly to Nigeria homeland not through a process of naturalisation or through an artificial citizenship but through birth:

> I am bound to this land by blood
> That's why my vision is blurred
> I am rooted in its soil
> And its streams flood my veins
> I smell the sweat of its men
> And the million feet that plod
> The dust of its streets
> Leave their prints on my soul.

In these lines, the poet attempts to reclaim his kinship with the homeland by describing how he grew up as a child. He displays this memory as authentic credentials to establish his entitlement to being called the son of the soil. He was peasant-born, and had experienced the hardship that living in neo-colonial Nigeria entails. The blood of his ancestors flows in his veins; he had played on the streets of the native land, perceived the smell of its environment and these have left their imprint not only on his body but on his soul. He knows the land like the back of his hands and has partaken of its seasonal weathers and the beauty of its topography. Beyond these, he has also shared in the pains and deprivations that are the experience of his people; in other words, he is a son of the soil:

> I have walked the footpaths of this land
> Climbed the snake-routes of its hills
> I have known the heat of its noon
> I have known the faces their creases
> I have seen pain engraved on the foreheads of many
> I have heard their agony (lines 9-15).

This poem was either written on a visit home or created on the canvas of a nostalgic imagination. He described this elsewhere as "the imaginative crutches that lever the exile out of the existential morass of un-belonging and regret". He further defends his right to the homeland by arguing that he was not brought to the homeland but was born there. He is thus rooted in the "soil". The homeland has left its imprint on his soul. This ring of attachment is possible because he is bound to the homeland "by blood". Although distance from home appears to have blurred his vision, his memory of the past intercourse with homeland, painful as it is, reverberates in his veins, in his blood. And distance cannot possibly change the value of his blood; it cannot undo his DNA.

In the second stanza, the poet decides to reclaim his experiences at home before he left for the self imposed exile. These experiences and the pains they cause are permanent scars on his body and soul; they cannot be taken away from him wherever he may be on the surface of the earth:

I have heard the wailing of a million
I have stood in the crowd where men
Mixed their sweat and wiped blood
From their brows cursing silently
I have stood in the middle of silent whirlwinds
And their heat has left its mark
I bear the mark of the masses on my brow.

His very passionate love for the homeland and bitterness about its condition, past and present are amplified by his blood connection to the land. The scars he carries in his soul and body are indelible; they are in his blood too. He is bound to the land inextricably by the common experience of pains and deprivations. While the poet tells his own experience here and why he believes his identity is defined by this past, he also calls attention to the obvious unsavory conditions of the homeland. The political and social condition at home is so bad that the people groan under the burden of existence; they toil endlessly and painfully such that they are "wailing" in their millions (stanza II, lines1). The people struggle to survive and "…men / Mixed their sweat and wiped their blood / From their brows cursing silently" (lines 2-4). This is certainly a testimony to the state of disenchantment and disillusion that characterise life in the homeland. The poet, therefore, explains why he is passionate and embittered:

And if I curse
If I raise this single voice
In the midst of dust and curse

If I lend a tiny voice to
The rustle of this crowd
It's because I am bound to this land.
(Stanza II)

He writes with bitterness because he has seen the suffering of his people and has been part of it, although he had decided to relocate to a self-chosen exile. This notwithstanding, the situation in exile constantly brings to the surface this memory of the painful past and the memory has continued to define the tone and content of his poetry. Therefore, he explains that the bitterness and anger in his tone is the result of his kinship with this oppressed and oppressing homeland. The poet expresses his undying loyalty to this shattered homeland. He affirms his connection and declares his kinship with the poor and the downtrodden. As a result of this unbreakable tie with the homeland, he particularly requested that he should be brought home for burial when he is dead; he would not like to be buried in exile. He expresses the desire in poem entitled 'For You Homeland':

And if my years be blown
Away in distant lands
like husks of millet
In Harmattan wind
I want to be buried
in a free country
Among my own people
Beside my ancestors
(*A Song from Exile IV*, lines 85-92).

Apart from the reason of his tie with the homeland, the other reason for his desire to be buried at home is the fact that he never really is at home in exile as he is not accepted as a member of the society; he is not free because he is an outsider. This is a testimony to the marginalisation experienced in exile. Therefore, he desires to be buried at home in "a free country" where his ancestors are buried and far away from the land of his exile where he lives as a second class citizen. The fact that the poet describes his home country as "a free country" as above is symptomatic of the psychological condition that he endures in exile. Ordinarily, one would describe America as a freer country that Nigeria, the poet's home country. Those in exile in America, for instance, enjoy certain freedoms that are denied their kin at home, including freedom of speech, and freedom of movement. Also, they are better off materially in exile than at home. However, life at home in is calmer psychologically. In exile, they are treated as second-

class citizens and have to put up with racial slurs. However, the poet thinks of the possibility of dying in exile and feels that the only way of reuniting with his own people is to be buried where his ancestors are buried. The graveyard is a sacred spot all over the world. People go to grave of their loved ones to renew their affinity with them and show their undying love for them. Thus, because of the love of the poet for his homeland and his bound to it, he requests to be united with his roots, the source of his being and existence. He expresses similar sentiment in the poem, 'Letters to His Mother'. He desires to be buried with the poor and displaced. Even in death he will love to be associated with the poor and the masses of the oppressed of his people:

when the last vein snaps
please scatter my ashes
in the quarter of the poor
down in the crumbling alleys
where the dogs lie.
the end is in sight.
I walk in circles now
uttering the last word…
sultry word
sultry world
speech is dead

("Letters to His Mother", lines 66-78).

Therefore, the poet decides to chronicle the condition of his homeland by painting the deprivation of his people as he does in this poem. This seems to be his only way of reconnecting to the homeland; it is the only past he can lay claim to. For instance, the poet was said to have been expelled from the University of Nigeria, Nsuka, because of his activism as a student. Therefore, his memory of the homeland is certainly not beautiful or palatable; it is rather very sorrowful and painful. Because of the kind of past and youth he had, he finds very difficult to sing of flowers or romance. Instead, his tales and songs are songs of sorrow and of the pains of his people with whom he fully identifies:

And if I sing not of roses and rivers
It's because I see rivers of blood
I look through the holler of the crowd
And I see blood on the ground
I see blood on the rockslabs
I look over the mangrove swamp
And I walk through fields of groundnut
And I see nothing but blood
I see blood in the face of the farmer
On the palm of the school child

I see blood on the statue
Of the Immaculate Mother
('I am Bound to this Land by Blood', stanza IV, lines 1-12)

His vision of the homeland is truly "blurred" by these painful and dark memories. The chaos that has become the homeland does not permit him to dream of roses and flowers or rivers, only "rivers of blood" even on the "fields of groundnut" and "in the face of the farmer" themselves. The violence in the country has become so sacrilegious and all polluting that the poet also sees "…blood on the statue / Of the Immaculate Mother". His memory is that of the desolation of his homeland and the suffering of his people. Since he grew up in the 60s, he must have experienced the bloody civil war and the military dictatorship that followed. Also, when he compares the relative prosperity of the late 60s and early 70s to the destruction and poverty that characterise subsequent years, which made him go into exile, he feels there is nothing to celebrate. Therefore, he justifies his temperament, tone and theme of his poems:

And if I raise my voice to holler
It is because the grasses wither in this deluge of blood
Fishes float on their bellies with their eyes covered
By the sanguine flood
(Stanza V, lines 6-7).

The fact that these memories are provoked by the experience of exile is alluded to in his poem entitled, 'All Because I Loved You'. In this poem, he also alludes to how wasteful and painful his youth was. His experiences and pains are the anvils and the furnace that shape his poetry. In other words, his poetry is a history of his life; it is also the history of his homeland. The poet's life is inextricably tied to his homeland so much that his escape to exile has not produced for him the respite he sought; the memory of the homeland he left behind haunts him. These experiences have contorted his life so much so that he lost the innocence and purity of his youth. The poet writes:

once i wrote with the irreverence of youth
and the fire of a heart burning to ash
i plucked words like faggots from blazing coal
and on the anvil of exile i hammered sorrow into verse
the burden of your suffering tore poetry from my flesh
and on the night of your hanging there was dust in my lines
i aimed for song and there was not an eye without tears
(Stanza I, lines 1-7)

He concludes the poem, 'I am Bound to this Land by Blood', by stating that the only pictures of the homeland that crowd his vision are those of death, pains, desolation and blood of destruction caused by despotism and deprivations. Therefore, he will sing

of these memories and sights as they are the history that bind him to the homeland and will not let him go. They are in his blood; they are the scars that link him to this homeland and authenticate his identity. They are the evidence of his claim and entitlement to soil of the land, his homeland:

> My pictures are the colour of dust
> And I sing only of rust
> I have swum in the flood
> And I know better
> For I am bound to this land
> By blood.

Here, the phrase "by blood" means more than the idea of blood relationship; it may also mean the common and collective experiences and history of violations and oppression he shared with fellow country people. Olu Oguibe left Nigeria during the military dictatorship of General Badamosi Babangida and as Niyi Osundare (1997) explains, the generation to which Olu Oguibe belongs alongside others like Ademola Babajide, Femi Oyebode, Afam Akeh, Ogaga Ifowodo, Esiaba Irobi, Onokoome Okome, Uche Uduka, Remi Raji, is "a generation of deep-seated anxieties." (1997: 40). According to Osundare,

> This is a generation born around Nigeria's independence (1960), Nigerian midnight children, as it were, who have spent the first three decades of their lives confronting the nightmare that the country has become. […] the temperament of the new generation ranges from angry through desperate to despondent. This is a generation which attained adolescence in the oil boom years, but dipped into poverty and unemployment a few years later as the country went from boom to bust. A generation whose dreams collapsed so rapidly that many of them are wont to lament with Oguibe: "I have aged in my youth"… (1997: 40).

Therefore, the history of this generation is so bleak and depressing that their anxiety and frustrations are easily detected in their writings. Is this not enough justification for the migration to the North? Coupled with the persecution of writers by the military dictators, these impoverished conditions prompted many Nigerian writers and intellectuals to go into forced or self-imposed exile. The deep-seated anxiety of this generation of Nigerians is well captured in a personal letter written by one of these writers, Ademola Babajide, to Osundare. Osundare quotes part of the letter as follow:

> I was nothing short of anarchy in ferment then. I mean how does one react to a gang of bandits desecrating the very earth in which one is rooted, and by so doing defiling the very meaning of one's existence? […] If I am still alive by then [another decade] I will

be 45 – the ploughing days all gone. So what fruits, what harvest
should one expect from such a season? (Osundare, 1997: 40)

Niyi Osundare noted that this letter accompanied a series of poems written by the writer, Ademola Babajide, titled, "A Grave November", which was inspired by the hanging of the Nigerian writer, Ken Saro Wiwa by the Nigerian military dictator, General Sani Abacha, in November, 1995. And as such, Olu Oguibe's declaration in *A Gathering Fear* (1992:91): "I am a child of war, I have bitterness in my blood" is a fitting representation of the spirit and mood of these writers and Nigerians whom they represent. All these writers who experienced the social ruptures definitely "have bitterness in [their] blood". It is this embittered blood that bound them to the land; it is the trade mark of their Nigerianness. And so, as Ezenwa Ohaeto asks in *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* (1996),

Is God now tired of this land?
I must go to see God
before God goes to bed
(24)

5.3.3 Race, Space, marginality and the loss of memory in *Bremen poems*

When the exile cannot find anything positive to remember about the homeland, then their imagination of the homeland "may strain and die". If it does die, then it becomes a sore festering indefinitely. A true crisis of memory then ensues resulting in what Yanick has described as the "obsessive fear of dilution" of culture and identity and the consequent anxiety of a schizophrenic consciousness. This is the sentiment of Oguibe in the above poems. This disposition belongs to what Osundare (2010) has described as the "first stage" of the impact of exile on the memory and consciousness of the exile writer. This stage is demonstrated in the constant reminiscences on past experiences and the culture of the homeland; "virtually every other night something from that culture comes to your memory. Everything you see in the new place carries the veneer of the country you left behind".

The second stage of the exilic consciousness, "the incipient denial and incipient rationalization", is demonstrated in the gradual erosion of values and cultural sense and its replacement with foreign images and representations. Osundare (2010) notes that the writer at this point begins to rationalise; "Instead of seeing the images of [their] indigenous culture in the foreign aspects" before them, they "begin to use those foreign

images as substitutes for the images of [the] indigenous culture". The third stage of the exilic consciousness, which he called the stage of "complete denial and complete rationalization", is a condition in which the exile writer, though still not completely cut off from the indigenous culture, "no longer blame [themselves] for being absent, for being away from it." These stages seem applicable to Nigerian writers like Chris Abani and are evident in the sentiments carried by some of the poems by Uche Nduka. Such attitude has been attributed to various conditions principal of which is the increasing marginality and isolation that define the migrant's existence in the new space and geography of exile. Because of the need to survive, they compromise and adapt to the language of their host community; they employ the metaphor and images of the landscape they now adopt. This act in itself is a form of alienation which is fueled by human social isolation, self-estrangement and depersonalization, in itself a form of exile.

In his description of the inevitable change of language and representation or images as a natural result of cultural displacement, Oha (2005) observes that it is a psychological challenge, a form of mental adjustment to demands and existential necessities imposed by the life in a foreign country:

> In their portraitures of the city, one is likely going to encounter interesting semiotic and stylistic practices, especially those that reveal their psychological, social and cultural adjustments to the exilic city space (1).

This disposition is a process of articulation of identity, which "is essentially rhetorical because it must create the pattern of the subjectivity of the new self to the new space" (Oha 2005: 2). These conditions characterise the creative disposition of Uche Nduka in *The Bremen Poems* (1995).

In *The Bremen Poems* Uche Nduka articulates his experience of Bremen City, which is a city of refuge which is, especially, built as a haven for persecuted writers. He narrates how this space and what it represents affect his creative sensibility and linguistic choices. Although Nduka went into self–exile in Germany, he also decided to take residence in Bremen. The seeming linguistic "re/identification of the self" by Nduka in *The Bremen Poems* is an ironic and paradoxical indication of the need by the poet to create a replacement for the homeland left behind within the geography of his exile. Oha (2008) describes this as an "attempt by the poet to 'speak' with the nuance of exile, the adopted 'home', and to cross a linguistic border, in an attempt to identify with the 'new' home" (2). It can be an actual search for a consolatory compensation for the

loss that exile and removal from the homeland caused; a search for an alternative 'home'. As Shittu Ayodeji (2009) observes,

> Though in *The Bremen Poems* the poet does not exhibit an obvious feeling of nostalgia for the homeland, he attempts to seek friendship and possibly permanent "home" in the new "City of Refugee" that Bremen promises to be, the desperation for friendship, a romantic desire to be in this City of Refugee is in itself a betrayal of his sense of loss of the homeland (343).

The love relationship between the poet persona and the Bremen city is well represented on page 29:

> Like a snail
> Bremen trailed, slowly,
> Through my skin,
> My friend, my flourishing friend
> My raw camera.
> How could I abandon her?
> How could I refuse
> Her hand in my hand?

The tone of this poem is desperate and urgent. The poet persona does seem to have a choice; he probably realises the fact that he needs to make the best use of the relationship he is able to build in Bremen. However, this intimacy between the poet persona and Bremen does not seem to last long as reality, even in this city of refuge, shows that it also has its own challenges. At a point the city ceases to be a "she" and becomes an "it", which suggests its hardness and unfriendliness. From a tender friend, "my flourishing friend" and a "her", Bremen becomes "a merciless host" and a tyrant:

> The scene cranks out iron, billboard, tar
> And the riotous zeal of junkies.
> Their begging hands circle my heart,
> The limping beggars beside a tram stop.
> Not claim in the pavement of noon,
> The city is their merciless host too

Although Bremen is truly a physical refuge for the poet, it is unable to shield him from the harsh realities that stare him in the face; the "begging hands" that "circle" his "heart" create another form of isolation and exile, a mental exile. This is perhaps due to the fact that these facts of life remind the poet of a similar condition at home. His mind travels back memory lane to what a fellow poet, Pol Ndu, once said as expressed in the poem, 'In a Corncrib' the poet persona recollects:

> Pol Ndu says
> Iron benders love eating salt.
> The beaching man needs his aspirins

His myths, his voyages, his mirth making.
Have a toke, he says, from a speeding verse.
Fleece my fears.
Walk the centre of my sobriety.

But the exile has nothing to own since he has already lost touch with his own myths and homeland. Therefore, the inability to find the expected and true respite, a sort of alternative "home", in Bremen bothers the poet's disenchanted heart as memory of his home country assails him. In "Note to a season" the poet persona expresses his loneliness and sense of rootlessness and wonders if he can bring himself to forgive the pain that his homeland has caused him by returning to its values and traditions. Because of the separation from home, the poet has become lonely and rootless floating around with no place or space to lay claim to legitimately. Therefore, he asks rhetorically:

Shall I luxuriously
Cradle my betrayal
and write the ballad
of my maimed county?
I have become a tree
thrust between the arms
of a lonely sky

(10).

The search for elusive identification with the new home is not uncommon with the experience of exile, especially when the home country left behind is not very inviting as the poet describes above; his homeland has been 'maimed' by oppression, poverty and possibly wars . Yet it is never a comfort to abandon the homeland and fully embrace a new destiny elsewhere. This dilemma is underscored by Wole Soyinka (2000) when he notes that the new environment only provides a temporary respite before driving the exile into a mental state of isolation and withdrawal born of the consciousness of their Otherness and un-belongingness. Soyinka himself has been in exile on many occasions. He has been in and out of the country, and had remained almost perpetually in transit until recently. Until recently, after Nigeria's return to a semblance of democracy, Soyinka had lived much of his adult life as a political fugitive. He was exiled from home due to persecutions by the state, especially under the country's several military dictators. But he always returned home. He, therefore, qualifies to describe the futility and fantasy of a home away from home. According to Soyinka,

> Exile may hanker for a sympathetic environment, one that traits an umbilical cord to abandon roots, as if a handful of earth has been sneaked into the baggage and delivered ahead of the wanderer at destination. Mentally, the newcomer does the papal rites – kneels

> down and kisses the ground. There indeed, a close duplicate of habitation is recognized and adopted – while the self is schooled in a few minor adaptations. Or else – schooled to exist in a kind of paradox, a state of tension where the mind simultaneously embraces an anchor in alien territory yet ensures that it stays at one remove from the alien milieu. (63)

This is a way of saying that the exile always finds this comfort, refuge and homeliness fleeting. They eventually realise that they are not truly admitted as equals or compatriots, not even in the "City of Refuge". There is always that sense of difference and alterity. Soyinka describes this psyche-space occupied by the exile as a liminal space comparable to that inhabited by Esu, the Yoruba god of the crossroads:

> [...] . Esu is a creature of liminal existence, just like the exiled writer whose residence is the frontier of reality, of the ambiguity of threshold, and one who is mostly content to be there [...]. An exiled writer is surely a creature of double alienation – one as a consequence of his transformative temperament and secondly of course by his physical displacement. (2000: 68)

Thus, the exile remains in a perpetual state of estrangement, ever wandering and ever in search of an elusive home away from the homeland. Kenneth Parker (1993) also describes the condition of exile and the writer's attempts to articulate it through writing as very problematic. It leaves the exile writer with a linguistic disability, an inability to find adequate words to express their experience, which only increases the sense of isolation and estrangement. Typically, African writers writing in the Western world face the dilemma of style and content as they have to find means of making creative writings accessible and meaningful to their immediate audience. Usually they do this by adopting the diction that is acceptable to their audience most of whom are ordinarily alien to their own cultural and linguistic origin. Another way of making their creative works relevant to their readers is by dealing with issues that are of interest to their target readers. These practices are evident in the works of African writers who have been assimilated into the West literary paradigm and those who are not very tutored in the African culture and traditions in the first place but who adopt African history as narrative template. Writers like Ben Okri, Chimamanda Adichie, Chris Abani, Sefi Atta, Uzodima Iweala, and Ernest Emenyonu belong to this group. According to Parker,

> The challenge of writing the imagined homeland from the perspective of abroad presents the writer with a different set of problems. To be sure, there is, especially after Jacques Derrida, the matter of what is often described as a "crisis of representation," marked by a retreat from geography and history into the embrace of

> so-called pure "textuality" itself, compared to which, Hayden White has reminded us, no field of intellectual practice is more imperialistic (70).

Many of writers in the group that Parker describes above have adopted the art for art's sake philosophy associated with Western literature and criticism as they are disconnected from the essence of the socially and politically engaged paradigm of African literature. Ojaide describes most of these writers as the children of "immigrants" who have very vague memories of Africa, especially regarding African traditional environment and social lives. Because of their disconnection from the real African culture and life, writers of this group who are neither in touch properly with the homeland or accepted by their surrogate countries lack a strong sense of history and culture in their writings. They are described by Pius Adesanmi (2005) as "children of postcolony", many of who, according to Ojaide, "suffer from a psychic disconnection from the continent" (2012: 33).

These writers write with American and European audience in mind. This is seen in their language, style, symbol and themes. Their writings represent an imagined Africa because they have not truly known Africa culturally.

5.3.4 Displacement, alienation and homelessness in Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*

Tanure Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1998) particularly addresses the social and political conditions of the homeland and how they produce the sense of dispossession and alienation that leads to the mass exodus of Nigerian to Europe and America. The collection is a reconstruction of the tragedies and hardship that result from the capitalist system of post-colonial Nigeria and the ruptures that it causes in the life of the people. Ojaide presents these situations in "an ideo-aesthetic" manner (Uzoechi Nwagbara, 2010:93). The situation at home is so bad that the migrant has no respite nor can lay claim to any place, any space as a haven. Wherever the migrant resides, at home or in exile, they are confronted with hardship, displacement and marginalisation. And so "it no longer matters where we live".

In the poem, 'Ships', the poet takes the reader back memory lane by comparing the present migration to the North and the initial trans-Atlantic migration of African slaves popularly referred to as the Middle Passage, "the blacked-out holocaust" (p. 16).

To the poet, a ship is a sign of exploitation and dispossession as it was during the slave trade and territorial colonisation of Africa and just as it is today:

> Ships have never been
> a good sign to me.
> Once launched, they
> dispossess pious lands
> of their gold and youth
> and taint waters with
> cadavers of stowaways.
>
> (16)

Ships are symbols of slavery and colonialism. During the slave trade era, they were used to carry away young Africans, male and females into captivity and when the ships came back during the proper colonisation of Africa, they were used to steal African resources. Today, with the connivance of African neo-colonial rulers they continued to be used as instruments of exploitation. Thus, the poet believes that the initial forced emigration and the subsequent colonisation laid the foundation for the current political and social dislocation that has impoverished the homeland. The situation has not changed, because even today, the exploitation of the country by Western imperialists is very pronounced as exemplified by the expropriation of the poet's backyard, the oil-rich Niger Delta, which has created multiple problems for the Niger Delta people in the form of environmental pollutions and the consequent destruction of the people's means of livelihood. This has brought woes and wars into the region. As Ojaide observes in his essay, ''New Trends in Modern African Poetry'',

> By the 1960's the rivers had been dredged to allow pontoons or even ships to enter our backyard. Shell BP had started to pollute the rivers, streams and farmlands with oil and flaring gas. Forests had been cleared by poachers and others to feed the African Timber and Plywood Company in Sapele. Streams and marshes dried up. Rubber trees were planted in a frenzy to make money and were soon tapped to death. (Ojaide 1994: 15)

These ships are instruments of capitalism and were used to disrupt the life of other lands and to continue, through neo-colonial connivance, the business of despoliation and in the process, "savage more" lands, and "/ infesting coastlines with mines" (p. 16). The native oppressors rule the land with iron fists and, like their colonial predecessors, exploit the land while the people suffer from social neglect and exclusion. The poet expresses this concern in "Libation" in which he accuses the neo-colonial

rulers of destroying the homeland and give the enterprising ones no alternative other than mass exodus to the North:

> The republic shrinks from its shores into a mole on the map
> And populates the states with dunes of dry leaves
> Fishers and hunters return without consolation–
> When the brush flares with frenzy, exodus
> Of the sharp-witted, skilled, and driving ones;
> The sack folds without the storage of corn or millet.
>
> (39)

The poet describes the hardship that precipitates the migration to foreign lands. There was first the internal exile, the social and political alienation of the people. There is confusion in the land as people lose grip of what used to be theirs: "the world we knew and held to our chests slides inexorably / into primordial confusion; /" and "faith collides with disbelief…" ('Home song" , 51). The result of this is withdrawal into "the surreal solitude of rancor–" ('p. 51) under which condition the people become aliens in their own land:

> We shall be homeless within our frontiers
> As long as the looting riots continue
> And they will continue to mock our fate
> As long as we raise a storm.
>
> (55)

When the people become alienated in their own country and the homeland is difficult to inhabit; when "the eyes blurred from exhaustion /" [and] "see no farther than the next half-meal"? ('Home song: III', lines 22-23), then "…fresh exiles will take to flight / to distances without root" (lines 24-25). There is therefore, a graduation from internal exile to external exile. While part III of the 'Home song' series describes the ultimate result of the deprivation in the country as the "flight" of "fresh exile" abroad, part IV describes the condition that engenders this flight: the internal condition of exile, when the people become "homeless within [their] frontiers" (p. 55). The poet sees these conditions as the consequence of the unholy alliance among the state, the elite and the multinational benefactors of the chaos. This chaos and condition of hardship is further amplified in the poem, 'In dirt and pride', where the poet reveals:

> Hardship has smothered the firebrands
> that once blazed a liberation trail.
> The land smothers every flower
> that flourishes a salutary fragrance…
>
> (75)

Every blessing that falls into the land
vanishes from hands, eyes ablaze–
the jinx of failure litters dead dreams around.
(76)

As a result of this inclement condition at home many Nigerians migrated to Europe and America. Rather than confronting the challenge at home, everyone abandoned the land and escaped. The number of those who left in the exodus is unimaginable. Martha Donkor (2005) blames the flight abroad on the mismanagement of the resources of the country resulting in postcolonial disillusion, political instability and economic failure. As Ojaide notes elsewhere, the condition serves as an impetus for migration to Europe and America:

> Dependency, underdevelopment, underutilization, and poverty have led to the migration of professional and non-professional African men and women to the economically developed world (2012:31).

After the exodus, the problem multiplied and became monstrous:

No one imagines how far others have gone
From this stone-covered hole that's home,
The peril grows into a millennial monster
That prayers to gods and stars will not halt
(75)

Up till this point, the poet describes the conditions at home that necessitate the migration to Europe and America. Then in the title poem, 'When it no longer matters where you live', the poet gives the other side of the coin: the reality of life in exile and the dilemma of the migrants who long for the familiar terrain of home, but at the same time, dread the wasteland that the home has become. Rather than advocating a Universalist philosophy, this poem actually reveals the irony of the condition of the exile who pretends to live as a cosmopolitan citizen of the world. In actual sense, the migrant cannot wait to return home because exile is not a haven after all:

For all its refuge, the foreign home
Remains a night whose dawn
I wish arrives [arrived] before its time
(77).

The poet-narrator is an eye witness of these conditions. All through the collection, he tells his own story of home and exile, although his experiences are also the experiences of many others like him who had gone the same route. He decides to tell his own story to warn those who may want to follow the same road he had followed. He

tries to tell them not to do so because exile is not the paradise it is painted to be. He tries to convince fellow countrymen and women that however chaotic and alienating the homeland may be, exile is worse. In fact, he explains that one does not know how homely the native land is until one ventures out and experiences the marginalisation and trauma that is the lot of those who live in foreign lands:

> There is none so hurt at home
> who forgets the pain outside–
> that's the persistent ache one carries
> until home's safe to return to,
> when it no longer matters
> where you choose to live!
>
> (77)

The irony in the last line, which is the title of the collection, is that, from an uncritical perspective, it gives the impression that the poet celebrates a cosmopolitan existence. This is, however, misleading. For example, in his article "Exile and globalization in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide: A Case Study of *When It no Longer Matters Where You Live*", Shija (2008), is of the opinion that the poet describes conditions at home and exile as equally inclement and, therefore, concludes that the poet: "views both his home and country of exile as equally strewn with hazards" (33). But Senayon (2009) argues that this kind of critical conclusion is problematic in the sense that there is a way in which one cannot but sees beyond this balance and dilemma that such reading presents. According to him, the totality of the poem seems to point to a different direction, "for the option in the end tilts toward home once we recognize that even at its best the "refuge" of "foreign home", remains a night whose dawn / I wish arrives before its time" (186). The reality is that the exile-poet, having tasted of life at home and abroad longs to return home because living in the foreign land is like living in an endless night with persistent ache. He waits for an opportune time when "home is safe to return to"; when he will not "go home / with hands over head. Nor/raised in supplication or surrender" (p. 77-78). He wants to wait for the time when he would be able to "take a drum home– / to banish fears" (p. 78).

This is the anxiety of the poet-exile. He does not want to return home in a state of shame and defeat. He wants to return home to the song of welcome. He, however, wondered when the time will be right. This is the usual dilemma that exiles have to contend with as they think of a return to the homeland. They worry about the uncertainty that awaits them; where they will start from and how they will fit into the landscape of the home they left many years earlier. Therefore, the return is continually postponed: "But for how long can the diver be towed under, / for how long in the dry season can the sun hold back its stare?" (p. 78). The poet, therefore, resolves to dare the storm:

Already partisan dogs track me
Through thorn bushes to desires
Bristling to bury me alive–
I have been bitten by an army of bugs
and I now speak out with fire in my mouth
In full view of hunters, sun and night
(79).

In part IV, the poet describes the futility of going abroad and discourages those who think that going abroad will solve the problem from such ambition. In the poem entitled "Immigrant voice", which is written in the Pidgin English, the poetic persona tries to describe what it looks like to live in America as an immigrant who lives on the fringes of the society. He tells his countrymen and his Delta people that the America that they see in movies and pictures is far different from the real America he confronts everyday:

Back home to here na long long way;
The picture of here from home is so different
From the wilderness I de see night and day.
(105 lines 1 – 3)

He then paints America as it is to an exile, an immigrant.

This na America with homeless for every corner
That I think I de a numberless world?
Where all the fine fine things in that picture
Everybody dress kamkpe that I think
Na angels, Hollywood Heaven they misspell?
I work standing so te for minimum wage,
Get dollars for one hand and give them out for the other.
I come back from work so dead I can't eat or sleep
And before dawn I don get up to begin another slave day.
(105 lines 4 – 12))

However, he does not succeed in his effort to dissuade his impoverished countrymen from coming to the same fate because they would not believe him. Instead, they accuse him of selfishness; they feel he is trying to prevent them from enjoying America as he does. Despite the fact that migrants to Europe and America face impossible situations every day, more people migrate there on a daily basis. In recent times, many migrants have died on the sea and in the desert while trying to cross over illegally to Europe and America. Yet this has not dissuaded people from trying. According to the poet, nobody believes his story about the pain of exile:

When I reply their letters from home saying
Here no be what they think they see for their minds
They no gree with me and call me lie-lie man;

"You de already there and you no want us to come."

(105, lines 13 – 16)

He listed some of the deprivations that are the lot of the immigrant to America, including the loneliness, segregation and discrimination, and explains to his family at home. He tries to explain to them that there is not much difference between America and Nigeria because in America too, "beggar, thief, poor, all dem de boku" (p. 106):

Sometimes I cry my eyes red for night in bed.
Wetin my eye don see for here pass pepper
Make me de prepare to go sweet home.
If God de, make e punish them
We drive me from Africa come hell.

(106, line 36 – 40)

It is very significant that this particular poem is written in the Pidgin English because it suggests the audience. He writes to his family members in the Niger Delta area where Pidgin English is very popular as a means of communication. It also suggests that he wants others outside the region to read his warning. Otherwise, he would have written the poem in the local dialect of his people. While the immigrant in this poem is the poet who narrates his experience as an immigrant to America, the fact that the title is written in the third person subject ,"he, she – the immigrants", makes it the experience of all immigrants wherever they might have migrated to in America.

The poet further paints the discrimination that immigrants face in America even from blacks like themselves who claim they belong to the first generation of migrants. This perhaps refers to the Black Americans who think that these new immigrants are illegal immigrants. By describing the status of these earlier immigrants, the poets shows that all blacks are treated as second-class citizens whether they were born in America or brought there. In the poem entitled "Deportations", the poet laments:

From the way
these great-grandchildren of migrants
talk of deporting newly arrived immigrants,
calling them illegal and other stinking names,
you would think
they don't know their family tree,
don't know their fathers,
And where they came from.
They won't accept they are bastards!

(107)

The poet uses of the word "bastards" in the above lines to describe the status conferred on blacks in America. The term can be read in two ways. The word "bastard" may describe African Americans who view their Black brothers who come to America voluntarily as competitors for black quotas in the world of work and business. In this sense, the poet may be describing them as "bastards" because, instead of uniting to fight for equality they are fighting each others as if they are not related. The word "bastard" may also have been used to describe the history of the African Americans themselves as former slaves. By describing African Americans as slaves, the white community transfers the same quality to all Blacks. To most of Americans Whites all blacks are the same; they are from the same source: Black Africa. As such, to them, all blacks are "bastards." This is pure racist denigration. Moreover, these slavers raped female Black slaves and produced the vast army of mullatoes in the US. The abuse was compounded by the rapists' refusal to claim the right of paternity, thus reducing the children to "bastards."

These conditions make the poet remember what he has missed and all the fellowship and relationships he left behind when he went to America. He begins to long for good old days in the plateau where he spent some of his younger days. This is the typical reaction of most exiles. When conditions in exile become difficult then home looms large in their mind. There is a feeling of nostalgia for the homeland even when returning could be more traumatic. Despite this, the poet prefers to go back home because home offers a sense of belonging, acceptance, security and the possibility of positive relationship. In most cases, these are absent in exile where the subject is an outsider. In the poem entitled "Accents", the poet laments:

> When I wake, my face
> wet from drowning,
> I long for days
> that break on a plateau.
> (17, lines 18 – 21)

He remembers the culture of his people, the festival in which he participated and counts his loss:

> I left behind
> A column of faithful words
> Whose shadows mob my tongue–
> I have left behind
> *egodi's* yearly call
> from its sky trail,
> I have left behind

the network of voices
that give warmth,
I have left behind
A delta of fortune.
(18, lines 22 – 33)

From this point on, the poet shifts his attention to the homeland and compares what he left behind in his flight to America with what he met in America and the lifestyle he is condemned to live over there. He concludes that home is better:

The sunbird left behind
Can never be matched
By this made-up face
(18, lines 47 – 49)

One may, however, wonder how home is better than exile if conditions at the homeland chased the poet into exile in the first place. But then, when one considers the manners in which Blacks are treated in Europe and America as second-class citizens, home may be justifiably described as better than exile. It is better in the sense of having a firmer and surer sense of self, and because the alienation from the natural environment diminishes. It may also be described as better because one has a firmer grip on reality. One does not feel like fish out of water and language does not weigh heavily on the tongue; self expression is easier and freer. Apart from these benefits and may be more, the homeland is as oppressive as exile. After all, the poet argues himself that it does not matter where one lives any more, life is challenging everywhere.

In his perpetual nostalgia for home the poet wonders how those left at home are doing and whether they still remember him. He examines his consciousness and what time has turned him to and again wonders if he can still lay claim to being an authentic songs of soil in his homeland. This sentiment is similar to those expressed by Olu Oguibe in "I am bound to this land by blood" above. Like Oguibe, the poet reassures himself and those who are concerned about his status that he has not really lost his identity; he is still the *iroko*, the same person that left home years ago. In the poem entitled "I am still the Iroko", the poet wonders if the homeland and the friends still remember him; he wonders if they still expect him back. On his part, he always enquires after those he left behind, "when winds blow / from across," (p. 19); how "are relatives / left behind" faring " in the brushfires" ? (p. 19). But, do they remember him too?:

Does the land
That threw me out
Miss me like
A part of his body

It wants back
For wholeness?

(19)

The poet does not forget how the home he left behind was, especially the Niger Delta where he comes from. Although this poem has a universal appeal, its immediate audience is the Niger Delta people. The poet knows there are always troubles in the Niger Delta; there are "brushfires" which may suggest real fire caused by oil exploration and which destroys the environment. There are also problems of social injustice that put the lives of the people in constant danger. Therefore, he always wonders how his relatives cope with the challenge of existence at home. Similarly, the poet reveals how he is able to cope with the wilderness of his own exile and still retain his cultural identity and his sanity. He usually get news from home and is updated on the traditions and culture of his people by his "faithful birdfriend" who brings him "the homestead's soil" and "songs that fill me / with longing to return" (lines 25-26). With this he is able to build his "own island / within this island–" (lines 30-31) of exile. In the same manner, he ensures that other migrants, "migrating birds", who go home every year take message home from him:

Migrating birds
Carry home my name,
Every season

(lines 21-23)

In this way he is able keep abreast of happenings at home so that he does not become a stranger to his own people. Many exiles actually devise many means of keeping in touch with their home country, many of which are nowadays through the internet. People are able to follow happenings at home through cable television channels. Many others also visit home once in a while, although not all exile are capable of the latter. The poet in this case, therefore, assures the readers that he has not lost his connection with home and that he is still a son of the soil, the Iroko:

I am not cut off
from home draughts
Since birds of all colours
make me their perch
I never shut off,
know neither night
Nor day, only one
unbroken song of life.
The salt I imbibed
from the old nursery

fortifies the body
& foils predictions
of early stunting.
Once driftwood,
then transplant;
I am still
the iroko

(lines 30-46)

Ojaide in these poems paints the life of an exile from his own personal experience. He describes how inclement conditions at home: political and economical challenges, drive Nigerians to migrate to the Western world in search of the Golden Fleece. He, however, shows that exile is not a haven or a paradise for the immigrant, but that like home, it also has its headaches and trauma. In fact, he advises those would-be migrants to think twice before leaving the warmth of the homeland since there is not much difference between the homeland and the real America. In an effort to tell his life history as an exile, a migrant to America, he has to unavoidably describe the culture and geo-political landscapes of home and exile. His life history is a unique blend of information about himself and the cultures he has experienced; a historical excursion into the past and present of Nigeria and a unique insight into the culture and life in America. For an immigrant in particular, this life means racism, cultural displacement and a lot of trauma. As such, one of the main themes of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* is the reconstruction of the many trajectories of globalisation, transnationalism and how these have impacted the growth and development or underdevelopment of many African countries, particularly, Nigeria. Ojaide looks at these from the angle of environmental, social and political conflicts and contradictions (Nwagbara 2010). In essence, the collection of poems is part of the tools used to engage the question of Africa's underdevelopment and relationship with the rest of the world; the poems also, quoting Shantz as cited by Nwagbara (2010),

> offer an important opportunity for global activists to move beyond the confines of Eurocentric and authoritarian political theories as well as providing a point of departure for anti-authoritarian activists to develop broadened insights into community-based resistance to the predations of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. (93)

Nigerian migrant autobiographical poetry provides a very interesting and unique perspective from which to view the relationship between culture, space and the construction of identity within a trans-national and multicultural context. It reveals how migrants have to cross cultural and physical borders and bridge gaps between these

borders. The 'long geographical perspective' of migrants and their displacement from their homelands or reference points force them to live with what Eva Hoffman (1991:135) has described as 'double vision'. Therefore, according to Salman Rushdie (1991),

> It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal (15)

Migrants' life histories are stories of life across borders of cultures and as such are actually ethnographies for their new country and the one they left behind. Migrants bring their old world to their present new world in ways that suggest that they "are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (Rushdie 1991: 10). Thus, in the process of writing their homeland the migrant can actually serve as mapmakers as they introduce new areas of the world to other parts of it. The impulse to write about the country one grew up in is a strong one for migrant writers and can be seen in all the texts discussed in this chapter. Ethno-autobiography articulates this kind of creative engagement. Usually, migrants' autobiographies show the interplay between dominant and marginal countries, languages and identities. Common and contemporary themes of migrant writings are those that border on issues of cross-cultural relations such as cultural displacement and dislocation, racism, the problems of alterity, identity crises, and the psychological impact of crossing borders, and language.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A POETICS OF AFRICAN ETHNO-AUTOBIOGRAPHY

6.0 Introduction

The primary objective of this study has been to argue and demonstrate that autobiography is not just about vain exhibition of the author. Ordinarily, all autobiographies are cultural products and the experiences narrated in them took place within social and cultural contexts. While some autobiographical texts simply present these cultural landmarks without consciously engaging them as ideological tools, there are others in which the authors set out from the beginning to interrogate the cultures that define their experiences. In these cases, the act of writing is itself a process of self and social criticism; the writing serves a cathartic purpose. Also, in these cases, culture is more than mere embellishment or aesthetic tools; it is an ideological instrument with which places and spaces are interpreted and identity is defined. This second description of the cultural engagement of self narration is true of literary autobiographies and Nigerian migrant and travel ethno-autobiography belong to this category.

Beyond the issue of the intentions of the author in an autobiographical narration, there is a way in which a text says more than the author intended. Structuralists would argue that a text is an autonomous entity which is capable of yielding meaning independent of the author's assumed intention. They believe that meaning in this case, is self-yielding. Although a post-structuralist would debate structuralism's idea of single meaning, he would not question the fact that a text is capable of yielding meanings even if the meanings are multiple in his case. A semiotic analysis of any text will also achieve similar results. Therefore, it is not important if the autobiographer does not intentionally used cultural icons and poetics, the simple fact that the text is written within social contexts underlines its cultural constitution.

Apart from the above main objective, the study has also addressed the issues of self-reflexivity and, therefore, subjectivity of all cultural products and all human writing for that matter. By examining the representations of culture in the selected literary ethno-autobiographies of Nigerian migrant and travel poets as composed of issues of racism, epistemological orientations, and alterity, the study sufficiently demonstrated that a well written autobiography can be densely engaging culturally. The study also

demonstrated that every cultural product provides a unique insight into social history. In fact, ethno-autobiographies are a form of social history if a social history is, as described by Ernst Breisach (1983), a form of historiography that shifts emphasis from prominent persons or the elites to the collective past of people of all social levels. Ethno-autobiography achieves this end. It is a medium through which those who are otherwise silent and whose stories are not included in official histories can tell their stories. It is the tale of the subaltern and their respond to the official narrations of the empire. Ethno-autobiography deconstructs grand and master's narratives.

Nigerian migrant and travel ethno-autobiographies articulate the struggles of Nigerian migrants and travellers and their challenges within a world governed by ideals of a globalised cultural and economies. They, essentially, address problems of racism, social inequality, cultural displacement, and alterity. In these texts, the authors interrogate cultural spaces of both their home country and those of their sojourn and visit. They portray how these places and spaces have impacted who they are. Some of these texts, especially the travelogues, are unique ethnographical portraits of these spaces and serve as very useful historical criticism. The study of these texts also demonstrates the role of the past and memory in the construction of identity. In the texts studied in this study the ideas of collective history and memory and how they form a body of knowledge and references from which individual members of the community draw for personal purposes are underlined. Nigerian migrant and travel writers, as post-colonial subjects, draw from this repository in their understanding of and disposition towards the cultural landscape of the 'other'. As such, their stories are, to a great extent the stories of others with who they shared the same colonial past and neo-colonial present. This quality of their narrations defines their connectedness and universality. While they narrate private experiences, they also in the process narrate the experiences of their people. Perhaps this form parts of the poetics African autobiographical writings. Modern African life and epistemologies are products of African pre-colonial and colonial encounters. There is a way in which post-colonial African literature is biographical; the literature in many ways represents a critical history of Africa. Because Africa is still essentially plagued by problems of poverty, neo-colonialism and other development problems, a portrait of it is a portrait of the experience of the people. This also defines the collectiveness of the experience of the Africans. While the texts examined in this study addressed the personal existential problems of the authors, they are also pictures of the experiences of many more whose stories are not yet told.

6.1 The ethnography of post-colonial African autobiography

The literature of a people is a representation of the culture of the people and, therefore, is peculiar in many ways. For example, modern African literature has developed as a response to the far-reaching social revolutions of the twentieth century on the continent of Africa. Both the content and the form concern the dual qualities of literature: the literary merits and the interpretation or analyses of literature as historical memory of the society. Some critics refer to this literature as "an alternative history", and a social document. Therefore, the literature in its various forms and genres depicts the peculiarities of the African experience and interrogates them. Stemming from this background of African literature, the autobiography in Africa can be said to be different from the autobiography in Europe or America in terms of content, form, context and function. This is because of the difference in experience, culture and epistemology.

As a cultural product, the autobiography in Africa reveals the African social structures, milieu, and epistemological orientations. Therefore, unlike the notion in some quarters that the genre of autobiography is of Western origin, every people has their peculiar ways of documenting personal experiences in the context of social histories. This view is corroborated by Dwight (2001):

> Given the importance accorded autobiography for the understanding of culture, personality, and society, it is imperative to study non-western traditions both for their own sake and comparatively. This path of study will highlight previously overlooked aspects of European autobiographies and should provoke new and insightful readings (32)

Modern African literature is defined by the interaction of African pre-colonial experience and traditions and the European mainstream colonial traditions, and the post-colonial responses to them. Post-colonial autobiography in Africa is the product of contemporary cultural and epistemological orientations of Africans; it is a narration of how these factors define their construction of selves and re-construction of their society.

The ethnography of literature consists in its articulation of social and cultural experiences. In ethnographic narrations, social and cultural experiences are put in perspective such that life trajectory reveals social constraints. Since the peculiarity of literature is its appropriation of language uniquely to represent culture and social history, it is inherently ethnographic. Ethnography of communication implies that language reflects the reality and peculiarities of its cultural milieu. It reflects the connection

between it and culture, "how language embodies the culture, the social and physical environment of the user of the language" (Ayodeji Shittu 2006: 50). Wole Soyinka (1976) describes this kind of literature as the literature of a social vision:

> A creative concern which conceptualises or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitutions[sic] (66)

It is in this vein that Attah Agbali (2008) described the ethnography of poetry as the ability of poetry to portray the observed mindscape:

> Poetry constitutes a form of interiorized ethnography that depicts the observational state of the mind in taking mental notes of its milieu and cryptically verbalizing these notes through the medium of versed texts. Within such powerful renditions, the world of human beings and nature is critically assessed creatively and presented in rhapsodies and prosodies that reference the relationship of being within the depth of being (existence). In this sense, a human being experiences a profound confrontation with oneself and one's existential universe that enables the creation of the purview of hominized meaning. (Falola and Aderonke 2008: 30).

He argues that the poetic genre is a veritable means of revealing myths, oral histories, social histories, and personal narratives and "offers great creative and luxuriantly insightful ethnographic perspectives regarding the framework of the authors' vision and the social structures and personal narratives that shape their poetic perception" (2008:30). According to Reed-Danahay (1997), this is descriptive of self-reflexive ethnography, otherwise called Autoethnography, a writing that represents the ability to transcend the "everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life" and "involves a rewriting of the self and the social" (4). As Agbali further notes, this quality accounts for poetry's constitution as "a web that spins different expressive thoughts and texts into holistic frameworks and collectives that are capable of sense-making" (30). In this way, it ceases to be "merely redundant formulae" but a production of meaning within cultural contexts.

Such [poetic] renditions of human experience and of nature "is critically assessed creatively and presented in rhapsodies and prosodies that reference the relationship of being within the depth of being (existence)"(Agbali, 2008: 30). Sandra L. Faulkner (2009) describes this quality as the authenticity and social values of poetry. According to her, the authenticity of poetry consists in the ability of poetry to achieve narrative

connectedness, which is evident when readers are able to experience their own realities through the poem they read. This is what Dasylva and Oriaku (2010:303) mean when they note that apart from portraying the life of important personages, autobiography also archives and documents social and historical events. In describing the Nigerian autobiography, they observe:

> [...] auto⁄biographies [...] reflect the cultural values, aesthetic trends and practices of the people as well as their socio-historical epochs. [...] reflect the dissonance in points of views and the myriad conflicts that characterize the Nigerian society at the same time that it enhances dialogue between the author⁄subjects of auto⁄biography and the public (303).

It is this connectedness that defines the peculiarity of African autobiography in general. According to Niyi Afolabi (2003), African autobiography is defined by the African worldview and culture which are essentially collective and communal. Afolabi observes that "in the African worldview, it is often out of place to define "autobiography" as the life of an individual since our lives are so interconnected, interwoven and essentially collective" (548). This is possible because of Africa's post-colonial condition and because of the impacts of pre-colonial values system on contemporary existence. This also made possible by quasi-socialist practices in many African societies. Although capitalism entrenches individualism in the world, the level of inequality and human challenges connects the life and experiences of many people all over the world, even in the most capitalist societies. In Yoruba verbal art, for instance, there is usually a collectivisation of the personal experience. When the verbal art is, therefore, appropriated into a popular consciousness, there is always a combination of the individual artistic talents with collective memory (Afolabi, 2003:551). Niyi Osundare (1989) describes this memory as both passive and active and that the degree of its intensity depends on the writer's choice of what to remember and what not to remember. According to him, an African writing is defined by the collective experience and memory and the writer's relationship to these experiences and memory as earlier discussed.

Afolabi (2003) describes these multiple narrations in the African writing and particularly in the African autobiography as a "polyvalent autobiography" (558). In this case, the autobiography is "double-edged and ambivalent" as it weaves the writer's culture and collective memory and the experience of their people and society with their own life. This again, according to Afolabi (2003), is the "ambiguity" of the

autobiography in the African context. As he observes, the ambiguity of the autobiography in the African context is defined by the "notion of the "I" as a mask where it is possible to assume many voices and subjects in order to accomplish the people's mission through collectivized imagination" (551). This understanding of the African autobiography is ably articulated by Niyi Osundare's description of his poetic autobiography as a cultural product. In response to an interview question by Stephen Arnold, Osundare provides this reflection on what I have described as the ethnography of the African autobiography:

> A poet of my category is problematic in terms of autobiography. Because of the kind of culture I was brought in, I was reared in a collective culture and I was socialized into the collectiveness of the culture itself. In the kind of society we are in, the "I" of the person is also the "I" of the other person. So this configuration of "I"s is really what makes up the society. This is not saying there was no individuality in Africa at the time I grew up. It is just that everybody believed the public fate depended upon personal commitment and personal duty. Now my own birth itself cannot be personal [...]. This is why the "I" becomes just one angle of perceiving a major public issue; it doesn't personalize the issue all that much, although it doesn't remove the individual element...So I think it is time we began to make some kind of case for the African autobiography as unique [...]. That means African autobiography subverts in some way the expectations we have derived from our knowledge of Western autobiographies. The African "I" is different (158).

Memory in autobiographical writings involves negotiation between the public and the private, and between individual histories and the collective history of the community. Therefore, as Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003:11) observed, the writing of an autobiography is a form of dialogue with the voice of memory. This is what David Farrell Krell (1990) described when he observed that the act of remembering brings about the immediacy of experience even those that are past. According to him,

> Remembering instigates a peculiar kind of presence. It 'has' an object of perception or knowledge without activating perception or knowledge as such and without confusing past and present. For while remembering, a man tells himself that he is now present to something that was earlier (15)

This kind of memory is described by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (2008:2) as cultural memory, "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts." This is clearly demonstrated in autobiographies written by African migrants who in a bid to

define their identity in their new countries of abode try to bring to play the past, the memory of the country that was left behind. In this kind of texts there is a dialogue between two cultures. African migrants' autobiographies are post-colonial discourses; they concern the negotiation of identity as defined by the politics of space and belonging. As Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi (1996:143) noted, immigrant writers who are aware of other cultural norms somewhat inevitably question what others see as reality or certainties. In this context, Thompson and Sangeeta argue that "autobiography illustrates why racial identity formation occurs at the intersection of a person's subjective memory of trauma and collective remembrance of histories of domination." Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir (2003) explains that migrant autobiographers attempt to bring their former country or "old world" to the present one or the "new world":

> When writing on their homelands immigrant writers can become mapmakers as they introduce new areas of the world to other parts of it. They also seek to trace their identity in their original culture, which is a common pursuit for writers. The need to write about the country one grew up in is a strong one and can be seen in all the texts discussed here. Autobiography is, of course, the perfect field for that and at times it can serve as a vehicle for bringing the old world to the new, as well as the past to the present. (145 -146)

The rhetorical fusion of individual identity and collective destiny assumed strategic significance under the aegis of nineteenth-century cultural nationalism, such that much of early African autobiographies, especially the nationalist autobiographies, were essentialist and celebrated the national cultures and tradition. Although this is also true of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' autobiographies, the latter are multicultural and transnational rather than nationalistic. This results in hybrid and shifting identities. As David Lloyd (1987) explains:

> The biography of the national hero is, in the first instance, a repetition of the history of the nation. Through conscious identification with the nation the individual transcends in himself the actual disintegration of the nation by coming to prefigure the nation's destiny: the total identification of the individual with the spirit of the nation is a figuration of the total unity of the political nation that is the goal of the nationalist's labors. (160)

Post-colonial autobiographies, including post-colonial travelogues, in whatever genre they may appear, demonstrate the radical uses to which autobiography is put by marginalised subjects whose assertion of a personal narrative voice, which also speaks

beyond itself, is a compelling means of cultural inscription. This kind of self narratives is not just to give voice to grievance or to set the record straight but by situating personal accounts of pain and suffering within wider social and institutional contexts, these writings critique larger cultural and political forces and so reconfigure the relations between self, nation and society in counter-hegemonic ways.

Although a genre has recognisable features which all writings belonging share, all forms of writing are cultural products and, therefore, carry the imprints of the cultural milieu that produced them. The cultural genes and aesthetics that distinguish every cultural production are the elements that define its ethnography. Thus, as Jerome Bruner (2001:16) observes in his exploration of the construction of life narratives as cultural constructions, while the self is regarded in Western ideology as the most private aspect of our being it turns out after closer inspection to be highly social and discursively negotiable. Therefore, to study autobiographies involves not only examining the cultural construction of personal identity, but also the construction of one's social culture.

African autobiography is essentially African in social vision. It is different from autobiography from other cultural environment not only because of these basic features but because of nuances and social realities and history that underline it. It is also distinguished by the use to which it is put. As Niyi Osundare noted above, the peculiarity of African autobiography is that it "subverts in some way the expectations we have derived from our knowledge of Western autobiographies." The "auto" in African life story is different from the "I" in Western life story. The collectiveness definitive of African culture and the colonial and post-colonial realities that define modern African conditions make the "I" representative of the collective "we". Although there has been some paradigmatic shift in modern Africa, the political and social realities in Africa still make absolute individualism unrealistic. The cultural memory and social experiences are still shared. This sentiment is perhaps well expressed by Toni Morrison in an interviewed upon receiving the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature. Her response, Kenneth Zola (1995) observes, reinforces the notion of how each of us must find our own connection to our roots. Toni Morrison chose to identify herself as a black woman writer rather than simply a member of the international community of letters:

> Had I lived the life that the state planned for me from the beginning, I would have lived and died in somebody else's kitchen, somebody else's land, and never written a word. That knowledge is bone deep and it informs everything I do. [and ...] "As a black and as a woman, I have had access to a range of emotions and

perceptions that were unavailable to people who were neither." (Quoted in Zola 1995:16)

Within the context of African-American literature, the black woman signifies two categories, namely the black woman and blackness in general. In Toni Morrison's submission, her history and the history of her forbears who actually lived and died under the yoke of White racism and those who because of social inequality serve in other people's kitchen are implied. This is story of racial discriminations against the black race. And this history in its collectiveness defines what she is because it speaks to her own situation and expands her scope of memory. Therefore, it is typical of black American autobiography for the author to situate their personal story within the collective experience of the race as shared experience. As Henry Louis Gates observes, the narrated and descriptive "eye" witness account is put into the service of "a literary form to posit both the individual author as well as the collective "I" of the race (1985: 11). This is not only true of African American storytelling and social system, but of black narratives generally, especially in the genre of autobiography. The attitude is a universal black disposition towards the writing of self, the personal and collective self, and the society.

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