Snežana Vuletić

From Colonial Disruption to Diasporic Entanglements:

Narrating Igbo Identities in the Novels of Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Chris Abani

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1 INTRODUCTION

> There is no better point of entry to the issue of the African intellectuals' articulation of an African identity than through the reflections of our most powerful creative writers.
> (Appiah, *In My Father's House* 74)

The year 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the declaration of the Republic of Biafra, an Igbo attempt to create an independent nation-state. The fact that many businesses in the Nigerian states of Anambra and Onitsha were closed on May 30th and that stay-at-home protests were organised in Enugu to commemorate the Igbo victims of the three-year war of Biafran independence testify to the continuing significance of Igbo identity. However, such displays of Igbo identification were perceived as a threat to 'unified Nigeria' and thus repeatedly met with determined opposition from the national government: In August 2017, Nigeria's president Muhammadu Buhari proclaimed that "Nigeria's unity is settled and not negotiable" and, in September 2017, the government sent the national army on Operation Python Dance II to put down "violent agitations by secessionist groups, among other crimes" ("Nigeria's Old Wounds"). The tension generated by the commemoration of the Igbo nation illustrates the continuously controversial meaning of 'Igboness.'

But what is Igbo identity? More precisely, what constitutes its meaning, how is this meaning shaped and sustained, and how has Igbo identity navigated through different historical and contemporary settings? Last but not least, what political valences do different notions of Igbo identity hold? These are the principal questions that motivate this study. Another driving force is the belief that part of the answer lies in narrative representations of Igbo identity: in ethnographic and historical accounts, travelogues, newspapers, literary narratives, etc. Under scrutiny in this study are, however, a set of Nigerian Anglophone novels which have significantly contributed to shaping and reshaping the meaning of 'Igboness.' Taking into account that my interest lies specifically in *literary representations* of Igbo identity, the observations and conclusions about the meaning of 'Igboness' that appear in this study are limited to what the novels considered make possible. I am not, in other words, claiming any authority in relation to what someone

who identifies as Igbo – besides, perhaps, these three authors – might think or say.

The events around the Biafra anniversary suggest that, to understand the meaning of Igbo identity, we need to engage with the historical conditions of its making. The strong relation implied between Igbo identity and the Republic of Biafra is telling of how social identities emerge in a particular timespace and, as such, become carriers of particular historical meaning. Reflecting on this, celebrated Nigerian Igbo writer Chinua Achebe remarked:

> You can suddenly become aware of an identity which you have been suffering from for a long time without knowing. For instance, take the Igbo people. In my area, historically, they did not see themselves as Igbo. . . . And yet, after the experience of the Biafran War, during the period of two years, it became a very powerful consciousness (qtd. in Appiah, *In My Father's House* 177).

Taking the greater history into account, to trace the "invention" of Igbo identity is to return to the late 19th century, when European missionaries, traders and travellers referred to the diverse communities in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland as 'Igbo.' Grouping the communities who initially saw themselves as independent peoples, an identity was fashioned that was further institutionally coded and legitimised during the British colonial rule (Onuoha 59). Since then, the contours of Igbo identity have been variously determined by the cultural nationalism of decolonisation in the 1950s, post-independence disillusionment in nationalist and nativist discourses, and, more recently, global migration and African diasporic formations.

It is no understatement to claim that narratives have played a notable role in defining Igbo identity in the singular and, subsequently, in challenging such a notion of Igbo identity in myriad ways. For example, late 19th-century accounts of the Igbo, which were predominately written by Christian missionaries of the British Church Missionary Society and the first European explorers, downplayed the evidence of cultural sophistication and social heterogeneity of the Igbo, and collectively depicted them as "heathen," "primitive" and in need of "enlightenment" (Ajayi, *Christian Missions*; Ekechi; Tasie). According to Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, missionary sources were "guided by racial stereotypes" rather than by any "genuine assessment of the situation on the ground" (15). Similar depic-

tions of the Igbo are found in colonial administrative accounts. One such account is Governor-General Frederick Lugard's *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922), where the author explains that the British "are endeavouring to teach the native races to conduct their own affairs with justice and humanity, and to educate them alike in letters and in industry" (617). No less important are late-19th-century literary narratives, such as, for instance, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902 [1899]), where Africa's indigenous peoples are portrayed as subject to "elevation" and "civilization."

Such and similar narratives of the Igbo motivated a long and heterogeneous tradition of revisionist and reactive writing from Nigeria: from literature that sought to "recover" complex precolonial cultures, histories and identities as part of the 1950s and 1960s cultural nationalism, to post-independence literature that critically re-examined the role of indigenous ethnic histories and traditions in postcolonial national settings, to, finally, 21st-century literature that explores the entanglements between indigenous ethnic cultural identities and other forms of identification. Such diverse literary discourses simultaneously emphasise the elusive meaning of 'Igboness' and the desire of textual representations to somehow define its meaning. Speaking about African identities more generally, Achebe described this condition as following:

> African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But, at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a certain meaning. . . . I think it is part of the writer's role to encourage the creation of an African identity (qtd. in Appiah, *In My Father's House* 173).

Achebe thus not only underlined that the set of meanings of African identities is infinite, but also asserted that fiction-writing plays a crucial role in realising some of those possible meanings of African identities through discursive construction.

Foregrounding, in this study, a diversity of literary constructions of Igbo identity, I argue against taking as given the idea that Igbo identity exists, that there is somewhere out there in the world a potential answer, a stable point of reference. Instead, I take fictional narratives not as spaces where some uncontentious meaning of Igbo identity is "retrieved," but as spaces where a range of workable meanings of Igbo identity is created in

discourse. This reflects the study's constructivist outlook on Igbo identities, which refuses to view Igbo identity as an objective or natural category. Put simply, I start from the premise that to understand Igbo identities means to tackle the question of representation. This shifts the focus away from the question of who the Igbo "really" are to what we know about the Igbo and how we know it. In other words, to consider the question of what Igbo identity means is almost inevitably to consider the question of what it means to write Igbo identity.

As indicated in the epigraph, Kwame Anthony Appiah understands African fiction as a privileged medium of inquiry into African identities. Appiah's view is justified, insofar as African Anglophone fiction has sustained an immediate engagement with the historical conditions of the making of African identities ever since its first flourishing in the mid-20th century (Irele, "Parables of the African Condition" 69). The intimate link between Anglophone literature and history can be traced from the modern African novel that developed in the mid-20th century to "boldly challeng[e] untenable myths and stereotypes of Africa and Africans in the wider world" (Emenyonu, "The African Novel" x) to contemporary literature that engages with themes of migration and globalisation to explore African identities that "mel[t] down and pou[r] into a field of 'inter-subjectivity' which is global in reach and polymorphous in shape" (Newell 186). The notion of African Anglophone literature that debunks the concept of 'art for art's sake' and embraces the function of art as a socially relevant and vital force, makes Nigerian postcolonial literary texts highly productive points of entry into the framing and reframing of Igbo identities in changing historical contexts.

To tease out the specific role of Nigerian Anglophone literature vis-à-vis identity politics, it is necessary to clarify the notion of 'postcolonial' as conceptualised in this study. In line with Stuart Hall, I understand the postcolonial as primarily an ideological and not a temporal category. Hall questions how productive it is to think about the postcolonial in terms of epochal stages marked by moments of transition, "when everything is reversed . . ., all the old relations disappear for ever and entirely new ones come to replace them" ("When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?" 247). The stagist notion of time tends to render invisible examples of continuity and entanglements, such as those embodied in the various forms of violence that represent

the legacy of colonialism in postcolonial states,[1] or in the entangled identities in formerly colonised spaces.[2] Yet it is equally misleading to think that after decolonisation "everything has remained the same" and that colonisation "repeat[s] itself in perpetuity to the end of time" (Hall, "When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?" 252). For that reason, I adopt an approach to Nigerian Anglophone literature that is sensitive to conditions of both radical change and continuity, not only between colonial and postcolonial literary discourses, but also within Nigerian postcolonial literary discourse itself. Such an approach allows me to conceptualise postcolonial representations of Igbo identity not as a complete abandonment and repudiation of earlier (colonial and postcolonial) notions of Igbo identity, but rather as their strategic re-use, critical re-examination and, inevitably, proliferation.

To understand the framing and reframing of Igbo identity in Nigerian Anglophone literature, I rely on a narratological reading of texts, which effectively teases out the formal mechanisms that contribute to defining meaning in narrative. Rather than understanding formal strategies as structural features of a text only, it is much more productive to see them as active forces in organising, defining and delivering content in narrative. In this respect, this study is heavily indebted to Fredric Jameson's concept of the "ideology of the form," which suggests that formal strategies are ideology in disguise:

> The study of the ideology of form is no doubt grounded on a technical and formalistic analysis in the narrower sense, even though, unlike much traditional formal analysis, it seeks to reveal the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes. But at the level of analysis in question here, a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works. (99)

As formal strategies are not simple vehicles of presentation, empty of content, but rather active agents in the shaping of content, achieving a fuller

1 For a discussion of the forms of violence in postcolonial states that represent the legacy of colonialism, see Mbembe *On the Postcolony* and Mamdani "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities".

2 For the forms of racial and cultural entanglements in South Africa that emerged as results of the colonial contact, see Nuttall.

understanding of how meaning is created in narrative requires a critical reading of the forms through which that narrative is rendered. A narratological reading that assumes an intrinsic connection between form and content places centre-stage the question of the potential (and limitations) of aesthetic means of expression to frame and reframe the ways we think (about) Igbo identity.

More particularly still, in my narratological reading, I adhere to the common cultural-narratological conviction that there is an organic link between literature and culture. For example, expanding on Jameson's notion of the "ideology of the form," Ansgar Nünning suggests that narrative forms are not only highly semanticised, but also "engaged in the process of cultural construction" ("Surveying" 62). More precisely and in line with Paul Ricoeur's reasoning about literature (1984 [1983]), Nünning reconceptualises the relation between literature and reality from merely mimetic to intercessory: "[I]t is more rewarding to conceptualise narrative as an active force . . ., one that is involved in the actual generation of the ways of thinking and attitudes that stand behind historical development" ("Surveying" 61). In that sense, the formal properties of novels are intensely engaged with – as reflections and as active interventions in – the social and cultural norms, values and trends of the period in which those novels originated. A methodological consequence, for my study, of such cultural-narratological insights is that a close reading of the formal means of expression and the production of meaning in narrative must be supplemented by a contextual reading that takes into account the cultural and sociopolitical valences of narrative presentation.

1.1 Literature Overview

Despite some recent attempts to link narratology[3] to some overtly socially and politically engaged fields in literary and cultural studies,[4] African literary studies remain to a large extent dominated by critical readings which locate the sociocultural and ideological dimensions of a text in its theme(s). While acknowledging the notable contribution of such literary criticism to

3 Also known as a "science of narrative" (Todorov 10).

4 An overview of these attempts is provided in Chapter 3.

making sense of the expanding and increasingly complex African Anglophone literature, I argue that it is equally important (and fruitful) to examine narrative form, and not just content, for its entanglements with the extra-literary context and ideological underpinnings of a text. In doing so, I wholeheartedly embrace the notion that Divya Dwivedi, Henrik Nielsen and Richard Walsh put forth in *Narratology and Ideology: Negotiating Context, Form, and Theory in Postcolonial Narratives* (2018): that bringing narratologically informed readings to postcolonial literary studies is an opportunity to tease out a dynamic "in which the formal articulation of ideas, speech, and action in and through the literary work can also be a transformation of [socially relevant] meaning" (n. pag.).

A trend to favour thematic over formal readings can also be observed in the literary criticism on Nigerian Anglophone fiction. The number of critical texts reaching for theme as a way to understand the sociocultural and ideological dimensions of story worlds in Nigerian Anglophone novels boomed with the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and has persisted to date, also in relation to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Chris Abani's writing.[5] In comparison, very few literary scholars have dedicated focused attention to the role of narrative organisation and mediation in the production of story worlds in Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's novels, and even fewer still to the contribution of narrative forms to representations of Igbo identities. Simon Gikandi expressed his concern that the formal mechanisms which inform Achebe's narratives are "rarely examined, except on an elementary introductory level" (*Reading Chinua Achebe* 2). If Achebe's novels have since been subject to some formal readings, Gi-

5 Particularly prominent examples of such critical readings of Achebe's fiction are collected in Emenyonu's (and Uko's) *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (2004), which appeared in two volumes, and Irele's edited volumes *Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe: A Norton Critical Edition* (2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to the African Nove*l (2009), to name but some. Noteworthy studies that investigate Adichie's and Abani's representations of Igbo identities, on the thematic level, are Onukaogu and Onyerionwu's *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Aesthetics of Commitment and Narrative* (2010), Krishnan's *Contemporary African Literature in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications* (2014) and Emenyonu's edited volume *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* (2017).

kandi's observation still certainly holds true for the increasingly popular writing of contemporary Nigerian authors Adichie and Abani.

One can, however, identify some notable exceptions. In relation to Achebe's novels, Simon Gikandi's *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (1991) and David I. Ker's chapters on Achebe in *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition* (1997) provide illuminating discussions of the semiotic and narrative strategies in Achebe's trilogy[6] and have, as such, inspired other highly relevant critical readings of Achebe's writing in terms of its formal dimension. Among those, I must mention Carey Snyder's "The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Ethnographic Readings: Narrative Complexity in *Things Fall Apart*" (2008), Abiola Irele's "The Crisis of Cultural Memory in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" (2009) and Nicholas Brown's "Chinua Achebe and the Politics of Form" (2011), which offer astute readings of the political ramifications, for the representation of the Igbo in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, of Achebe's usage of the narrating instance. Balanced formal and thematic readings of Adichie's and Abani's novels, on the other hand, can be found in shorter yet insightful critical texts, such as Amanda Aycock's "Becoming Black and Elvis: Transnational and Performative Identity in the Novels of Chris Abani" (2009), Christopher E. Ouma's "Chronotopicity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (2012), Aghogho Akpome's "Focalisation and Polyvocality in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (2013), and Madhu Krishnan's "On National Culture and the Projective Past: Mythology, Nationalism, and the Heritage of Biafra in Contemporary Nigerian Narrative" (2013).

With their detailed inspection of the intersections between narrative form, socio-historical context and ideological content, these critical contributions provide valuable incentives for probing the multifaceted and dynamic relation between narrative form and representations of Igbo identities in Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's novels. However, there is, as of yet, no book-length study which foregrounds and subjects to sustained critical scrutiny the ways in which narrative forms in Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's novels manage their entanglement with the embedding socio-

6 Achebe's trilogy consists of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964).

historical contexts and their inherent potential to facilitate a whole range of representations of Igbo identity. My study seeks to push this line of research forward by demonstrating the potential and benefits of reading literary representations of Igbo identities from a postcolonial narratological perspective. In other words, my study fills some of the gaps in as well as advances the existing formal criticism on Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's writing by interlacing postcolonial criticism with narratological reading to understand how representations of Igbo identity result from the ways in which narrative forms reflect and refract the influences from the embedding contexts, on the one hand, and how they actively shape ideologies of the text, on the other.

At the same time, the exploration of the relation between postcolonial poetics and the sociocultural, and thus the ideological in the text makes my study a useful contribution to the emerging trend in narrative studies of bridging the gap between narratology and postcolonial literary criticism. To my knowledge, there is no book-length study in the field of cultural narratology, or its sub-field of postcolonial narratology, that explores the sociocultural and ideological dimensions of the formal presentations of postcolonial identities from Nigerian Anglophone literary perspective(s). A somewhat comparable attempt, albeit in diasporic Indian Anglophone literature and much smaller in scope, is Monika Fludernik's "When the Self is an Other'" (1999), where the author examines some possible formal means of representation of postcolonial identities. Examining writers as diverse as Achebe, Adichie and Abani, my study offers a focused and detailed analysis of the heterogeneous forms and functions of narrative forms in Nigerian Anglophone literature, in a way which provides further evidence for Fludernik's claim that narrative forms are variables sensitive to cultural and historical difference, or, in other words, that narrative forms are not universal categories whose meaning, currency and validity are held as uncontroversial ("Narrative Forms").

1.2 Aims and Outline of this Study

Distilling the most essential ideas presented in the previous section, one can say that this study has two principal aims: First, it seeks to conceptual-

ise an approach to literary representations of Igbo identities that accounts for a close link between narrative form, ideological content and socio-historical context. An important step toward this aim, to be undertaken in Chapter 2, entails addressing the discursive character of African social identities more generally. This allows me to contemplate not only on the role of fictional narratives in the production of African identities, but also on those narratives' sociocultural dimensions and political valences. Another important step, undertaken in Chapter 3, is to address the narrative forms analysed in this study as facilitators of the narrative emplotments of African social identities, more generally, and Igbo identities, more particularly, that question, undermine or debunk ordinarily available and commonly circulating emplotments. The underlying assumption in these two chapters is that narrations of African identities are constitutive of cultural practices which reflect and actively act upon the circulating visions of social reality. As a result, the relationship between literary representations of identities and extra-literary contexts is bidirectional: The context affects literary presentations as much as literary presentations affect the ways in which extra-literary reality is perceived. Secondly, the study explores the particular contribution Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's novels have made to producing, (re)negotiating and challenging notions of Igbo identity. This endeavour, in which I engage in Chapters 4 to 6, will ultimately provide a deeper insight into how narrative forms in Nigerian Anglophone novels embody ideologies of resistance and plurality across time and in relation to different sociocultural contexts.

To meet these aims, this study focuses on selected novels by three authors who are commonly perceived, nationally as well as globally, as representative of Nigerian Anglophone literary tradition: Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Chris Abani. My choice of authors is motivated by two main reasons. First, Achebe, Adichie and Abani are not only of Igbo origin, but are also deeply preoccupied with Igbo cultural heritage in their writing: For example, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960) rely significantly on Igbo histories, cultures and identities as a means to make sense of the colonial past and the national future; Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013) explore the meaning of symbolic and material Igbo legacy in Nigeria's culturally and socially dynamic urban

spaces; and Abani's *GraceLand* (2004), *Song for Night* (2007) and *The Virgin of Flames* (2007) examine the role of Igbo traditions in contexts of political violence, economic precariousness, war, transnational migration and diasporic dispersal. Through such fictional explorations, Achebe, Adichie and Abani substantially contribute to framing and reframing what it means to 'be Igbo' in different socio-historical contexts. Secondly, Adichie's and Abani's writing is in many respects indebted to Achebe's early fiction. Not only have Adichie and Abani openly addressed their literary relation to Achebe,[7] but a number of scholars have critically discussed the multiple forms in which Achebe's legacy figures in Adichie's and Abani's writing.[8] For that reason, an exploration of these three authors' oeuvres under a common interpretive framework is particularly suited to teasing out how the strategic re-use and critical re-examination of the inherited notions of Igbo identity produce continuities as well as tensions and ruptures in the Nigerian literary tradition.

While the reasons for my choice of Nigerian Anglophone writers are their active engagement with the meaning of 'Igboness' and strong intergenerational resonances, my choice of particular novels by these writers is motivated by a diversity of socio-historical contexts and discourses in which those novels intervene. In Chapter 4, I read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* as examples of modern African writing which looks at Igbo tradition in a way that creates a different order of reality, in which the Igbo are portrayed on their own terms and not through the colonial lens that cast them in the role of retrograde and passive other. In Chapter 5, I read Abani's *GraceLand* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as novels with a strong revisionist agenda directed against the totalising notions of tradition and nation that render invisible the marked heterogeneity of postcolonial experiences of 'being Igbo.' Finally, in Chapter 6, I read Adichie's *Americanah* and Abani's *The Virgin of Flames* as novels which overtly move away from the notions of nation and cultural authenticity that have haunted Nigerian literary tradition since Achebe, and

7 See Adichie "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience" and "We Remember Differently," and Abani "Chinua Achebe: My Complicated Literary Father" and "Our Living Ancestor".

8 See Boehmer "Achebe and His Influence"; Whittaker; Tunca "Appropriating Achebe"; Ogude; Ejikeme.

toward the explorations of historical, cultural and racial entanglements that shed a new light on the meaning of Igbo identity in Africa as well as in the African diaspora. This choice of novels underlines the heterogeneity that marks Nigerian Anglophone writing, the heterogeneity that, to anticipate my argument, is reflected both in the novels' thematic as well as formal presentation of 'Igboness.' The point of departure in Chapter 2 is, in the widest sense, a discussion of narrative representations of African identities. More precisely, in Chapter 2.1, I use poststructuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial critical interventions as tools for conceptualising narrative representation in relation to discourse and power, in a way that foregrounds cultural and political dimensions of the African identities as defined in colonial and postcolonial discourses. I maintain that narratives of African identities are systems of signification deeply implicated in social practices of representation, meaning-making and power relations as shaped by colonial and postcolonial contacts between different African and Western agents. Building on the notion of narratives as significant elements in the acts of representation, meaning-making and power negotiation, Chapter 2.2 explores the potential of (literary) narratives to (re)negotiate culturally circulating notions of African identities and to generate new ones. Assigning (literary) narratives a relational and generative character vis-à-vis extra-literary reality, I argue that postcolonial narratives are particularly apt tools for constructing contesting African identities that disrupt dominant perceptions of social reality.

While Chapter 2 offers a theoretical means to conceptualise postcolonial representations of African identities, Chapter 3 outlines a methodology for critically reading the narrative forms that facilitate those representations, particularly in literary discourse. To achieve this, Chapter 3 proceeds in two steps. In Chapter 3.1, I invoke arguments from cultural narratology to establish the benefits (or, rather, necessity) of close reading for the formal means of expression in postcolonial narratives in light of socio-historical developments and ideology. An important argument in this chapter is that a particular usage of narrative forms in postcolonial fiction expands our understanding of these forms, in a way that opens up the possibility to fully acknowledge the uniqueness and innovation of postcolonial writing. Chapter 3.2 continues the discussion of a narratologically informed close reading of novels that is mindful of postcolonial conditions and concerns

by providing a more detailed overview of particular formal strategies as facilitators of the narrative emplotments that challenge dominant representations of African identities. I discuss exactly how formal strategies, while responding to the changing socio-historical contexts and different dominant discourses on African identities, contribute to variously defining African identities in postcolonial fiction: from coherent and readily-available categories to elusive, inconclusive and contested ones.

In Chapters 4 to 6, critical analyses of the selected novels by Achebe, Adichie and Abani become the primary focus. Each of these chapters begins with an introduction, which provides historical grounding for the literary readings that follow, and closes with a brief conclusion, which links more closely the results of the literary readings to the previously outlined historical contexts and embedding discourses. More precisely, the introduction to Chapter 4 discusses colonial Orientalist discourses, which contributed to the production of a 'primitive' and 'static' African, and early postcolonial responses to such discourses in the form of positive nativism, whose underlying thrust was the rehabilitation of Africa's abused humanity and history. The introduction to Chapter 5 reflects on the fate of grand explanatory narratives of nation and tradition as foundations for Igbo identities in post-independence Nigeria, a country hampered by ambiguity about the nation and distrust in totalising discourses on tradition. Finally, the introduction to Chapter 6 addresses contemporary experiences of globalisation and migration as conditions radically redefining ways of thinking and experiencing 'Igboness' by inviting us to navigate through complex diasporic entanglements in order to better understand the sites of conjuncture between ethnic Igbo identity and other forms of social identification. The three introductions thus address some of the most significant trajectories that have historically affected the (re)invention of Igbo identity: the colonial disruption and early postcolonial attempts to fashion an autonomous and liberated Igbo subject; the crumbling of faith, since independence, in nationalist and nativist discourses that equally essentialise collective identities; and transnational and diasporic social and cultural trajectories that fragment and destabilise unified ethnic and cultural identities.

Having sketched larger historical and discursive formations as frames for Achebe's, Adichie's and Abani's novels, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 subsequently turn to investigating the contribution of individual novels to prob-

lematising, reframing and/or debunking dominant notions of Igbo identity. In Chapters 4.1 and 4.2, I scrutinise Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* for the ways in which their narrative strategies facilitate narratives of Igbo identity that radically disrupt colonial representations of the devilish, child-like and simple-minded 'Other.' In Chapter 4.3, I focus on the character perspective structure in *No Longer at Ease* as a means with which Achebe explores the plurality of possible national futures for Nigeria and their concomitant visions of the place of ethnic Igbo culture and identity.

In Chapter 5, I turn to Abani's and Adichie's novels which address the failure of totalising discourses of tradition and nation to offer satisfactory frameworks for making sense of heterogeneous and, at times, contradictory experiences of 'being Igbo' in post-independence Nigeria. Both of the novels analysed in this chapter – Abani's *GraceLand* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* – express strong opposition to the nativist and nationalist discourses that construct coherent and reliable collective identities. Chapter 5.1 focuses on Abani's use, in *GraceLand*, of parallel and embedded narratives as a means to stage a confrontation between different discourses of Igbo tradition, a confrontation that emphasises the limitations of totalising conceptions of tradition in the process of reproducing a sense of cultural identity. Chapter 5.2, on the other hand, discusses Adichie's use, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, of multiple character focalisation as an agent of a fragmentation of the history of Biafra into the plurality of personal stories which suggest new ways of emplotting Igbo identities. The analysis of these two novels ultimately reveals a shift in writing Igbo identity, away from coherent and reliable representations to postmodern explorations of the fissures, slippages and inconsistencies involved in the making of Igbo identities in post-independence states of crisis.

The analytical section of the study ends with Chapter 6, which deals with Adichie's and Abani's novels that are (largely) set in the African American diaspora. The chapter focuses on Adichie's *Americanah* and Abani's *The Virgin of Flames*, both of which usher in new conceptualisations of Igbo identities in the age of globalisation and ever-growing African diasporic formations. Chapter 6.1 engages with Adichie's use of fragmented yet interconnected space in *Americanah* as a way to capture the multidimensional and translocal nature of 'Igboness' in an age of heightened mobility, and historical, social and cultural entanglements within and

outside of Africa. While Abani's *The Virgin of Flames* also explores the trajectory of individual Igbo identity in the diasporic context, it foregrounds the experiences of disrupted cultural transfer and dislocation. Chapter 6.2, therefore, predominantly focuses on how Abani manipulates narrative time to evoke a sense of continuity and discontinuity in the protagonist's identification as Igbo, and thus ask what ethnic Igbo identity means and how one (re)constructs a sense of it in the multicultural global context. My critical explorations of these two novels identify an emerging trend in Nigerian Anglophone novelistic writing toward searching for a new paradigm for thinking about Igbo identities, by abandoning the Orientalist logic which operates on the notion of difference and turning to globally shared phenomena as a ground for establishing contemporary meanings of 'being Igbo.'