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SEX AND THE HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECT NIGERIAN NOVELS

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Abstract

Before now, sex was a taboo in African literature. However, emerging voices rebel against this reticence. Among such new voices and works are Nigeria's: Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). These novels represent aesthetics of sex in Nigerian fiction. Adopting the postmodern theory this paper argues that these writers' engagement with sex assaults Nigeria's established literary conventions and that an open approach to sex liberates writers and readers from the strictures of convention and widens the possibilities of knowledge accruable from literary subject.

Key Words: Aesthetics of sex, Nigerian fiction, postmodern theory, literary conventions

Introduction

One of the striking features in new Nigerian fiction inclines towards overt sensuality, where the writers place romantic love, intense sexual desires, or libido at the centre stage, depicting them openly and breaking the readers' sense of convention. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and

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Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), (henceforth *Half*, *Waiting*, and *Everything*, respectively), have been chosen in this study to represent this new aesthetics in Nigerian fiction. The choice of these authors stems from their wide reception and critical acclamation as writers whose voices can be trusted for speaking for their generation, the third generation in Nigerian literature. In this category are younger, newer, contemporary writers who started writing in the twenty-first century, "between the year 2000 and the present" (Nnolim, *Issue.* 228). One agrees with Heather Hewett that we now have younger writers who "are not only setting themselves apart from earlier generations (most of all the first) but also attempting to redefine Nigerian literature through their craft, both in their choice of subject and style" ("Coming of Age" 78).

The authors' open treatment of sex as subject in their novels is an ideological position that calls for personal freedom – freedom both from the point of literary artists writing and from the point of fictional characters living out their lives, freely and unfettered from contraptions of myth and the constrictions of tradition. They envision sexual passion as part of the human condition, shocking the audience and provoking people to question tradition and accepted values. This study interrogates the writers' engagement with sex in these novels in the light of postmodern aesthetics and shows how the sexual formula is used as a literary tool.

Review of Theoretical and Critical Literature

The postmodern theory stands on the premise that the Western world has, contrary to their projections, failed to meet human needs. Experiences of the two World Wars shattered the optimism and confidence in the idea of civilization, human progress and hegemony held by the West. The wars changed ways of thinking and of being in the world. The system or "grand stories" or "meta narratives" of Nazism, Marxism, Scientism, or Rationalism ended up oppressing "the other" and consequently proved to be total failures. In Tejumola Olaniyan's view, postmodernism's deconstruction of the imperial European Subject is significant because it cautions against "all putative claims to a subjecthood that would authorize or be the rallying point of knowledge or collective action or politics"; hence, postmodernism engenders "epistemological humility" that discourages certitudes (638).

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Postmodernism is driven by scepticism, and is critical of any view that claims to be objective, neutral, unbiased, or rational. It is from the prism of the postmodern theory that we are warned of the danger of a single story.

Postmodernism displays a tendency towards disorientation, which as Abrams and Harpham (176-177) explain, is achieved through violation of accepted norms by creating new artistic forms and styles, introducing "hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matter" in which the artists seek to "shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture." Furthermore, postmodernism places emphasis on visuality, leading to the graphic novel – expressed in the metaphor of the free animal, where according to Terry Eagleton, "the animal lives unhistorically: it hides nothing and coincides at all moments with that which it is; it is bound to be truthful at all times, unable to be anything else" (389). In postmodernism, alternative perspectives (the "petite" narratives) are welcome, giving way to what Frederic Jameson sees as the assimilation of "the various high modernisms into the 'canon' and the subsequent attenuation of everything in them felt by our grandparents to be shocking, scandalous, ugly, dissonant, immoral and anti-social" (374).

Alan Macfarlane perspicuously characterizes postmodernism as "a dissolution of worldview" with its essence as an attack on all large theories, showing that we are past them or after them, hence the proliferation of many "post" theories ("A World"). He further explains that there is no agreement on what postmodernism is; and that the only definition is that it is against meta-narratives: there is no shared, comprehensive, harmonized vision as had been the case with the previous age in history, the modern age, identifiable with the Enlightenment project of human progress, of science, of certainty and objective reality ("A World"). Thus, Richard Tarnas (401) defines the intellectual ethos of postmodernism as "one of disassembling established structures, deflating pretensions, exploding beliefs, unmasking appearances", which assumes a vast unmaking marked by such terms as "deconstruction, decentring, disappearance, dissemination, demystification, discontinuity, difference, dispersion." All such terms relate to postmodernism's "corresponding ideological commitment to minorities in politics, sex, and language" and uphold a critical logic that

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refuses "the tyranny of wholes" based on the conviction that "totalization in any human endeavor is potentially totalitarian" (Tarnas 401).

Heather Hewett has drawn attention to the fact that some critics have talked about the "stagnant concepts of 'Nigerian literature' that do not include newer works, which they argue more accurately reflect and respond to contemporary Nigeria" (77). She gives the instance of Helon Habila who distinguishes his fiction from those of the earlier generations as follows:

If you have read my book, you will see that it's totally different from *Things Fall Apart*. I try to avoid that… I don't know what to call it – that exotic stuff. I want to write about the reality that is happening now. The use of myth and legend and history was very traditional. Times have changed. (Quoted in Hewett 77)

Before the emergence of new Nigerian literature, sex had been silenced in line with the "rhetoric of reticence" (Balogun 22) that had guided the literary practice and taste of the time. And even whenever sex was featured at all, its expression was governed by discretion, decorum, decency, shyness or indirection – the standard of an edict of reticence, as Osofisan lucidly deposes in his essay "Wounded Eros and Cantillating Cupids….." Commenting on the emerging Nigerian writers' tendency towards sex, Henry Chukwuemeka Onyema says: "A heart breaking novel like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* has enough raunchy vibes to make an impotent guy do unholy things" ("The Place of Sex in Nigerian Literature"). The texts of this essay belong to the third generation fiction, which Kanchana Ugbabe (16) says has made "forays into the 'touchy' subjects that incur the wrath of the guardians of morality" being that in African literature sex is a touchy subject whereby, "We skirt around it, imply it, suggest it and pass over it."

Unlike the first generation where the identity of the writer is clearly defined, there arises in the third generation the question of who a Nigerian writer is, given that "we live in a world without borders where frontiers, nation states and mental fences and boundaries have been replaced by migrations and a vibrant intermingling of ethnicities and races" (Ugbabe 13). Willem Jacobus Smit aptly observes that "such an 'unprecedented dispersal' of peoples, cultures and commodities results in postcolonial and postmodern societies that are locked in cultural exchanges, resulting in hybridized communities and

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cultures"("Becoming the Third Generation"). And in a postmodernist temper, Adichie, Habila and Atta feature "petite" narratives of marginalized experiences. In the postmodernist order of knowledge found within multicultural and transnational reality, the writers exercise their liberty to explore themes hitherto forbidden, or marginalized as unimportant, as not the big, important issues. In the postmodern postcolonial state of knowledge, the writers assert their freedom to pursue the individual, private, little, marginalized, experiences of sex. Thinking that the new writers are interested in the trivialities of city life and sexual promiscuity, Charles Nnolim says they lack thematic focus and refers to them as the "fleshly school" whose "focus is now women, wine, club, fun" (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, *21st Century Nigerian Literature* 100). Similarly, Dan Izevbaye opines that "the present generation has acquired something a bit less momentous" unlike the Soyinkas and the Achebes who "have historical importance" by dealing with "big issues that have resonances beyond the nation" (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, *21st Century Nigerian Literature* 101).

These three writers are products of their time. They are children of the postmodern, postcolonial state of Nigeria responding through their art to the experiences of their age. If in these works there is a "demonstration of almost extreme sexual and sensual liberties" (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* 174), it is because the age to which they belong is ripe for such sensibility. We live in a sex-crazy society. The evidence in Nigeria's social ethos, music and film industry is rife. Very recently, Chidi Amuta ("Digital Sex and Make-Up Wonders") has drawn attention to the obsession with sex in the society: "As things stand now, no one seems so sure anymore as to whether sexual deviance and perversion constitute immorality, criminality, digital age entertainment or democratic freedom turned into license." We live in a world without borders, a world with internet reality, and a transnational, multicultural world where the process of globalization that started aeons ago, through migration, trade and colonialism has attained a full blown stage. And nothing remains strange or hidden anymore; everything is open and mixed up; everything is allowed, everything is exposed!

This study seeks to show that the writers' provocative recreation of sex is purposefully meant to deconstruct and destabilize traditional conception of sex, with a view to registering an ideological position for

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liberating writers, characters, and subject from the constrictions of established conventions.

The Humanity of Sexual Consciousness

The graphic and insightful treatment of sex in these texts underlines its importance in human life. Life is sexualized; hence, from the evidence of sexual psychology, a child's thinking begins with its effort to gain self-knowledge as defined by its sexual body (Harold Bloom xv). Being the first to acknowledge child sexuality, Sigmund Freud affirms that sexual drives are born out of natural instinct and that sexuality is at the core of human personality. In addition, Alfred Kinsey's research shows that children are naturally curious about their bodies and sexual functions: They get curious about where babies come from, about the differences between males and females, and some do engage in genital play, such as exhibiting or inspecting the genitals, with siblings or friends ("Human Sexuality"). As Ferdinand Fellman and Rebecca Walsh explain, the human emotional intelligence benefits from sexual desire, which results in erotic fantasies that "turn intimacy into a source of human self-consciousness" ("From Sexuality to Eroticism…"). We can, therefore, appreciate the fact that sexual instinct is innate in human beings, that sex resides in the human consciousness, and that the desire for sexual pleasure is an important motivating force in life.

Emmanuel Obiechina, without specifically referring to sex, talks about the need for the writer to be aware of "those structures of inner existence, which heighten our perception of a given human condition, those features that touch our chords of feeling and response intimately, features of our inner consciousness" (9). Most certainly, sexual emotions belong to those "structures of inner existence" that deepen our understanding of the human condition. Sex is not present in the texts for its own sake, nor for excitement and titillation but for a purpose, namely: as a style and a statement of vision in the continued struggle to free sex from repression, denial, or condemnation, and to establish its value to humanity. D H Lawrence opines that sex is "invaluable to human daily life", and "without it the world grows grey". He further reiterates: "Sex is a very powerful, beneficial and necessary stimulus in human life, and we are all grateful when we feel its warm natural flow through us, like a form of sunshine" (1958-1960). Lawrence's assertion aligns with the concept of "osunality" in African sexuality which valorizes the place of

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sexual force in human life. Explaining this, Nkeiru Nzegwu (258) states, "Osunality affirms the normality of sexual pleasure and the erotic. When absent in life, the result is suspended animation or stasis, and… life effectively halts." From this, we can infer that something is definitely wrong with the sex act that is devoid of pleasure for one or the other of the conjugal parties, as in the example of rape or non-consensual sex.

By making sex an integral part of their novels, Adichie, Habila, and Atta actually maximize the advantages that literature as an art can confer. And that is the advantage of room and scope for everything that falls within the realm of human consciousness, which includes the consciousness of sex. Deliberate and purposeful, the sexual formula in the texts posits a postmodernist sensibility evoked in the animal imagery that bares it all and leaves nothing to secrecy. As will be evidenced in the following section, sex is visibly centred and used as an important artistic instrument.

Sex as a Literary Tool in the Texts

Characters are fully developed in the novels through their physical and inner consciousness of sex, and not sketched merely as rudimentary souls. The humanity of the characters is realized through their sex life. Take the example of the white character, Richard, in *Half*. He is shy and has an "endearing uncertainty about himself", with the implication that in bed with Kainene, erection eludes him out of his anxiety and fear of failing to sexually satisfy a stupendously confident woman. It takes Kainene's prowess to coach and help him, and all through, she is the one in charge, determining the tone and pace of their relationship. He even has to ask his houseboy Harrison for herbs to enhance his sexual performance. From a postmodernist perspective, Richard is portrayed as a deflation of White man's superiority, confidence, or invincibility through his sex life. He feels insecure and threatened on account of his sexual jealousy of Major Madu. At the end, when Kainene is lost in the war, Richard's sexual jealousy still reveals the worst of him as he confronts Madu with the question, "Did you ever touch her?" This question ends in a fight between them, with Madu crushing him with blows (430). All of Richard's obsessions with Biafra, his jealousy, and inferiority complex are tied to erotic love. And his life disintegrates as soon as this love is terminated with Kainene's disappearance as part of

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the war casualty. At the height of the war, he has enjoyed robust sex, being the only joy to clutch at as a relief from the war tragedy:

> They would go out to the veranda.... When she climbed astride, he would hold her hips and stare up at the night sky, and for those moments, be sure of the meaning of bliss. It was their new ritual since the war started, the only reason he was grateful for the war. (*Half* 307-308)

Apart from Richard, the other expatriates' sexual behaviours speak metaphorically about the Empire's mission. The British expatriates' lifestyle is rather connotative, thus : "All they did ... was have sex with one another's wives and husbands, illicit couplings that were more a way of passing heat-blanched time in the tropics than they were genuine expressions of passion" (237). Such sexual habits correlate with the colonial desecration and violation of revered values of the indigenous "other". Their sexual acts are as illicit and condemnable as their mission and conducts in the colonies. The rules are set aside in the geographical spaces of the colonized "other", whose weather is demonised as "heat-blanched" to legitimize adultery and its symbolic correlate of colonial injustice.

Sex serves as a device for depicting the humanity or otherwise of characters, revealing their consciousness and essential nature as sexual beings. Accordingly, the story of the major characters, Ugwu the thirteen year old houseboy, the pairs of Odenigbo /Olanna, and Richard/ Kainene, with the intimate details of their sex life is central to the narrative.

In the context of national violence, Ugwu's obsession with sex sometimes becomes symbolic. Coming early as the first graphic depiction of sex in the novel, Ugwu's masturbatory fascination with Nnesinachi's breasts foreshadows the aborted dream of the Biafran struggle. Fearing that somebody may marry her off and he will never get to touch her breasts, he indulges in sexual fantasy with her:

Her breasts ... were the images saved for last on many nights when he touched himself, slowly at first and then vigorously, until a muffled moan escaped him. He always started with her face... then

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he imagined her arms around him, her body moulded to his. Finally, he let her breasts form; sometimes they felt hard, tempting him to bite into them. (P. 9)

Ugwu's fantasy ends up as mere illusion: the illusion of denied desire comparative to the unfulfilled dream of a Biafran state. And on the other hand, his actualized unaffectionate, quick sessions of sex with Chinyere are so unsatisfactory that he imagines her to be Nnesinachi while having sex with her. In this sexual act we find a metaphor for both the tense union between Biafra and Nigeria in the botched struggle and the forced melding of the disparate tribes into the Nigerian nation by the British imperial authority. Similarly, the sex act between Odenigbo and Amala, the voiceless poor village girl, metaphorically echoes the dynamics of power demonstrated in the violent exploitation of the poor citizens by the ruling colonial and state authorities. In other words, sex in this example serves as a connotation for the oppressive, manipulative exploitation of the weak, present in the hegemony of the state over the powerless and vulnerable subjects or that of the colonial masters over the colonized. Other than revealing the postmodernist paradigm, therefore, Adichie's engagement with sex in *Half* sometimes makes relevant statements about the state of the nation.

Jumoke Verissimo observes that although Adichie has written a story on Biafra, the fact cannot be denied that "she has portrayed sex as something that should be fussed about, because it is integral in the humanizing and the dehumanizing of people during the war" ("Characterizing Sex"). This fact is best illustrated with Ugwu whose character is related to the different nature of his sexual acts with Chinyere, Eberechi, and the bar girl rape victim: Firstly, his mating with Chinyere points up sex as a sensual, pleasurable, physical action without any romantic or emotional attachment; secondly, his affairs with Eberechi promises to have become his true romantic love; and thirdly, his involvement in the rape act represents the ultimate corruption of sex that afterwards continues to haunt and afflict him with a guilty conscience.

The type of sex act defines the relationship that exists between conjugal parties. For instance, the quality of Odenigbo/Olanna sex act differs from that of Ugwu/Chinyere, or even that of Odenigbo/Amala described as "hasty thrusts" and "rash lust." In effect, the bond of affection or intimacy between couples is mirrored through sex. Olanna

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thinks of Odenigbo as her "life's constant" (322) and is touched by anything that happens to him. This is what Fellman and Walsh have in mind when they say that eroticism changes the "human's entire view of their companions and of themselves", and that eroticism "'remodels' emotions and motivations, causing them to be more complex and sensitive" ("From Sexuality to Eroticism…").

Sex becomes a tool with which to gauge the emotional attachment and intimacy between couples. The love between Odenigbo and Olanna takes the central place and is accordingly matched with the quality of their sex acts. The emotional depth between Odenigbo and Olanna and between Ugwu and Chinyere is contrasted through their sex acts. Thus, Ugwu will only have "hasty thrusts" with Chinyere at the cover of darkness but thereafter in the day there remains nothing between them.

We cannot miss the pervasive presence of sex in Adichie's *Half* where master, mistress, houseboy and maid are delineated in their sexual realities. Ugwu's teenage consciousness is dominated by the sensual, whether he is thinking of Anulika his sister, Olanna, or Nnesinachi his childhood attraction, or Eberechi – all these women are evocative of sex to him. He erotically fantasizes about Nnesinachi's breasts, or imagines his brother in-law Onyeka having sex with his wife Anulika, his sister (119), or thinks of Olanna's moans, and of Eberechi's "perfectly rounded buttocks." Ugwu's inner consciousness, his psychological growth, emotional, physical and mental development from naivety to maturity is monitored through sex.

Atta infuses into the narrative of nation explicit depiction of sex, using the characterization of Enitan and Sheri, as does Adichie with Ugwu, to explore the consciousness of a growing child as sex centred. While Enitan's father discusses the politics of the country with his friends, the two teenage friends pursue their sexual curiosity, during which Sheri introduces Enitan to the world of sex, sharing with her the sweet gossip of the sex secrets of Bisi and Akanni, the house girl and the driver (p.36).

In *Everything*, sex is often mirrored as a tool for patriarchal domination; hence, upon maturity and as a mark of commitment to a revolutionary vision of gender role, Enitan and Sheri call it quits with

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the marriage and mistress spaces, which are made to look like more of licensed sites for sex.

Complications from abortion following a rape assault destroys Sheri's womb and renders her barren for life, with a zero chance for marriage and actualization of one of the greatest aspirations of the human heart: procreation. This trenchantly connotes the barrenness in a country raped by political oppression and unremitting leadership failure. Sheri's experience sharpens Enitan's horizon for a better perception of the dynamics of sex.

Consequently, sex features in the life of Enitan, the coming-of-age protagonist, from adolescence to full maturity. Her development from innocence to knowledge and to an assertive personality with a voice relates directly to her sexual experiences. At eleven, Enitan is thoroughly ignorant and confused about sex and her sexual body. Arin, her mother, has given her the impression of sex as a filthy, unpleasant, dark and secret evil. From a point of religious sinfulness, her mother skirts round sex like an unmentionable subject (27-28). But this shy and vague attitude to sex is assaulted and pulled down through Sheri whom Enitan's mother dismisses as "omoita – street children" with a bad influence on her daughter. Sheri disrobes sex of the clothing of mystery and confusion present in Arin's attitude and initiates Enitan into a frank conversation on sex. Arin's and Sheri's attitudes, therefore, tend to represent the contrastive approaches to sex noticeable in the earlier and contemporary ethos in Nigerian literature. Sheri opens the door to sex to Enitan as she tells her something about Akanni and Bisi: "He is doing her!"… "Sex," she said. "Banana into tomato." "Don't you know about it?" (36). Enitan, until now, has been ignorant of her sexual body part, and is shocked to see her vagina for the first time – describing it as something that "looks like a big fat slug" (37). From here, her interest is awakened, and she reads a romance novel *Jacaranda Cove*, and gets fascinated by a passage that "described a man and woman kissing and how their hearts beat faster," all of which brings her to the consciousness that "the whole world was full of sex" (40).

As we can see, the sex formula is not at all peripheral to Atta's *Everything*. It is interwoven into the characterization and the theme of self-discovery and assertion. It is, among other things, a growth measurement yardstick, a coming-of-age device for the exploration of psychological curiosity in children. It also accounts for the exploration

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of the dynamics of power between male and female, especially as seen in the victimhood of Sheri through rape and abortion. At the end of the day and upon maturity with the benefit of an educated hindsight, Enitan inclines herself to a defiant position on the societal tolerance of unequal sexual power relations that privileges the males. She therefore rejects both the sensual and power dimensions of sex, accepting only its utility for procreation, and thereafter calling it quits with marriage. In her later life as a married adult, her adolescent inhibition in naming sex gives way to an open approach as in the following dialogue between her and her husband:

> 'Woman, what d' you think I paid your dowry for?'
> 'Good sex,' I said, strutting away.... he said, I would have to perform my wifely duties and give him some. ...you'll be lucky if I ever have sex with you, after all the sex I've had to make this baby.'… Sex my ass. (208)

Marriage is here truthfully interrogated as an agency of sex, providing an approved space for sex with the dowry as the approval licence. This is corroborated by the Quranic evidence that gives the term for marriage as "nikah" literally meaning sexual intercourse ("Human Sexuality"), and this gives credence to the view which in sexual psychology traces children's knowledge of sex to family romances. In *Half*, Adichie captures the image of knowing children in the Mbaezi family one room residence, where Olanna wonders what growing up has been like for the Mbaezi children, "seeing their parents through the curtain, hearing the sounds that might suggest an eerie pain to a child as their father's hips moved and their mother's arms clutched him" (43) .

In *Waiting*, much like in *Half*, love stories are interlaced with "nation crisis." There are the romantic stories of the pairs of Lomba/Alice, Joshua/Hagar, Muftau/Janice, Lomba/Sarimam, Nancy and "her man", and Auntie Rachel and her late soldier husband Davou. The love story of Lomba and Alice is so deep that it is described in the metaphor of lock and key: "This was soul calling to soul. A tired, trapped lock at last meeting with the key that unlocks it" (80). Love is the only bright side in a gloomy dark nation figuratively pictured as

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prison. In a cruel transient world that tends to enfold all in death occasioned by military misrule, only love offers meaning to life. Military dictatorship impacts negatively on the individual's life so much so that love becomes an unaffordable luxury. The anomie robs Lomba of his love, his education, and friends, and throws him into a prison that ultimately deprives him of his selfhood. But in such a state, sexual love stubbornly thrives in his consciousness. He reminisces about Alice: "You stood up and started to go, then you turned back and took my face in your hands and planted a feverish kiss on my lips" (100). This love impels him to write love poems which cushion for him the harshness of prison experience.

Lomba's unfulfilled love for Alice or even Joshua's painful love for Hagar evokes the doom and frustration of the citizens through the repressions of military dictatorship. In the demonstration, Hagar is killed and Lomba is incarcerated and forcefully disconnected from Alice who, compelled by dire circumstances, starts a relationship with a member of the oppressive military ruling class, General Ngai. In the face of her father's desertion of the family and her mother's cancer treatment within the context of pervasive poverty brought on by bad governance, Alice is left with no better option than to key into a commodified sexual relationship with a military general with enough money to spare. Ultimately, the different love stories represent the frustrations of the time, mirroring an extreme form of tyranny that robs the ordinary people of the basic privilege of sexual love. Muftau robs Lomba of his love poems to advance his sensual passion; and Alice is taken over by General Ngai. The powerful wicked take it all: sexual love fuses into nation story to symbolically represent a dehumanizing existence under a dictatorial regime that turns ordinary people into a bunch of castrated, impotent beings without worth, without the power to actualize the human sensual emotions of love – a central source of life's force.

What is more, the emotions of love reveal the tender and human side of Muftau other than his established image as a cruel jailer, revealing the positive impact of sexual consciousness on our humanity. A comprehensive delineation of Muftau is achieved through sexual love. Both love and oppression simultaneously abide in him, with the overriding conclusion that love conquers all – prison walls, religion, prejudice and what have you. Here, Muftau expresses his excitement about his love for Janice:

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> 'We are of different religion. She is Christian, I am Muslim. But no problem. I love her. But she still doubted. I did not know what to do. Then I saw your poems… yes, this one…. It said everything I wanted to tell her". (17)

Of all the love stories in *Waiting*, only Muftau's love of Janice is granted the prospects of fulfilment. The romantic affairs between the pairs of Joshua/Hagar, Lomba/Alice, Lomba/Sarimam, Rachel/Davou, and Nancy and her man are doomed to painful frustration by circumstances beyond the lovers' control, which poignantly denotes the anguish or emptiness of life without the sensual love of a man and a woman. Lomba experiences a piercing feeling of pain upon losing his second love, Sarimam: "He sat down alone in the room after she had gone, at the edge of the bed, staring at the wall before him, trying to ignore the pain in the bleeding hollow where his heart used to be." In his pains, he comes to the conclusion that the composer of the line "I've loved and lost" must rather be somebody who "had never really loved, not as truly and deeply and sincerely as he loved Sarimam" (187).

Conclusion

Attempts have so far been made to show that Adichie, Atta, and Habila have successfully centred sex as an important part of their narratives and used it purposively, to delineate characters as well as mirror national issues. By this, they underscore the fact that the human consciousness is dominated by sexual emotions. All in all, there is an enthusiastic depiction of normative sexual relationship, revealing the characters' essential humanity through their experience of sex expressed in their outer physical and inner mental or emotional reality. And very importantly, sexual consciousness expressed in the tender emotions of love between the opposite sexes is claimed as one of the experiences that remain common and relevant to humanity for all time: Sex is claimed as useful and relevant within the time and space of contemporary Nigerian prose fiction. In conclusion, Adichie, Habila, and Atta clearly suggest that if, indeed, literature is about the totality of human experience, sexual knowledge should then be included and accepted as a legitimate part of the literary subject.

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