**Canonising Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo:**

**Contemporary African Literature in the Global Literary Field**

Jasper Sattentau, Department of English, McGill University, Montreal

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**Abstracts**

In recent decades, growing audiences in Europe and North America, both mainstream and academic, have been reading—and writing about—novels from the Global South. The Anglophone African novel, which is increasingly consecrated by academics, reviewers, and prize committees, presents no exception here. My thesis examines the canonisation of the contemporary African novel, with a focus on British and American institutions of consecration, in order to study how institutional forces confer value in the global literary field and, in doing so, guide our readings of the works they consecrate. I examine the reception of three hypercanonical works by two contemporary African novelists—Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013), and Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). By analysing the institutional reception of these works, and then close reading the works themselves, I compare how Euro-American academic and mainstream discourse positions these authors and their novels in relation to how the novelists themselves, through their self-conscious fictionalisation of canon formation, position their work in the global literary field.

Au cours des dernières décennies, des audiences croissantes en Europe et en Amérique du Nord, qu'il s'agisse du grand public ou des universitaires, ont lu et écrit sur les romans du Sud global. Le roman africain anglophone, qui est de plus en plus consacré par les universitaires, les critiques, et les comités de prix, ne fait pas exception à la règle. Ma thèse examine la canonisation du roman africain contemporain, en se concentrant sur les institutions de consécration britanniques et américaines, afin d'étudier comment les forces institutionnelles confèrent une valeur dans le champ littéraire mondial et, ce faisant, guident nos lectures des œuvres qu'elles consacrent. J'examine la réception de trois œuvres hypercanoniques de deux romancières africaines contemporaines : « Half of a Yellow Sun » (2006) et « Americanah » (2013) de l'auteure nigériane Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, et « We Need New Names » (2013) de l'auteure zimbabwéenne NoViolet Bulawayo. En analysant la réception institutionnelle de ces œuvres, puis en lisant attentivement les œuvres elles-mêmes, je compare la manière dont le discours universitaire et grand public euro-américain positionne ces auteurs et leurs romans par rapport à la façon dont les romanciers eux-mêmes, à travers leur fictionnalisation consciente de la formation du canon, positionnent leur travail dans le champ littéraire mondial.

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## Introduction

*Th[e] World of Letters functions invisibly for the most part, save to those most distant from its great centres or most deprived of its resources, who can see more clearly than others the forms of violence and domination that operate within it.*

– Pascale Casanova, "Literature as World"

*My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.*

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"

In her influential formulation of the global literary field, Pascale Casanova argues that only those most distant from the field's centres of power can apprehend the hierarchy and inequality that constitute it (194). Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie remarks upon this form of symbolic violence in her celebrated TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story." Using her US roommate at college as a paradigmatic example, Adichie decries the 'single story' available to those, particularly in the West, regarding Africa. In contrast to the wealth of literary representations from (and of) dominant regions within the global literary field, Adichie lays bare the dominated position of African representation from one of the centres of domination. Although novels from the periphery may have the best chance to lay bare the workings of the global literary field, misreading them for the 'single story' risks reinforcing those hierarchies rather than undermining them.

It is in this context of inequality that we must understand the growing popularity and marketability, in recent decades, of novels from the Global South, particularly for audiences in Europe and North America. The Anglophone African novel, which is increasingly lauded by academics, reviewers, and prize committees, presents no exception. This thesis examines the

reception of contemporary Anglophone African literature in the global Anglosphere to understand how individual novelists accrue prestige and are made into exemplars of a larger field. This loosely-defined literary field is, as we will see, structured as a unipolar geometry, with the well-resourced end centred on the United States, and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. I focus on this field's reception of three canonical contemporary African novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2006 novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, her 2013 novel *Americanah*, and the Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names*, also published in 2013. These novels are paradigmatic examples of a cluster of African fiction published in this period that received outsized attention from various sectors of the global literary Anglosphere.

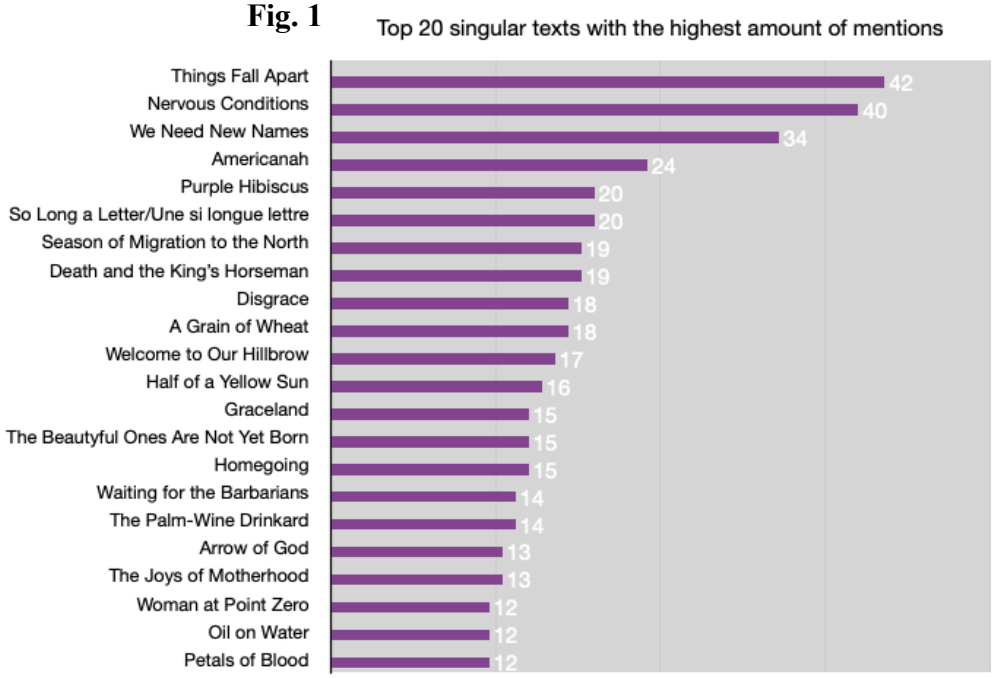
My thesis explores the contrast between the value afforded to African fiction in that Anglosphere and the ways that African writers themselves define African fiction. In *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), Graham Huggan examines how value is attributed to postcolonial works, identifying a struggle "over the value of cultural difference," whereby Anglophone metropolitan culture attempts to define the margins by translating the local cultures of the 'non-western world' into saleable exotic objects (32). This commodification "help[s] these books and their authors acquire an almost talismanic status" (Huggan 19). This struggle over meaning between cultural producers from the margins and the institutions that convey prestige, which are more often than not located in the dominant centres of the literary field, lies at the heart of this thesis.

Since *The Postcolonial Exotic*, we have seen efforts to move away from 'non-Western' fiction allying itself with the term 'postcolonial,' and a partial rejection of the stereotyped exoticism Huggan describes. Kalyan Nadiminti argues that by 2018, the postcolonial novel had been successfully displaced by "the global anglophone novel" (376). Indeed, the literary institutions of the global Anglosphere have characterised novels like Adichie's 2013 *Americanah* as 'global novels,' aligned with a US-based literary tradition. These prototypical examples of Nadiminti's trend present the opportunity to reappraise Huggan's paradigm. Nadiminti examines

how the creation of this new global Anglophone novel has been institutionalised in the USA through the MFA programme in creative writing. My thesis, in turn, examines how the literary institutions of reception attribute value to these works and how they produce and commodify a new genre of writing—integrated into a global literary field more sceptical of Western 'exoticist' modes of representation, but still transformed in troubling ways by the process of commodification.

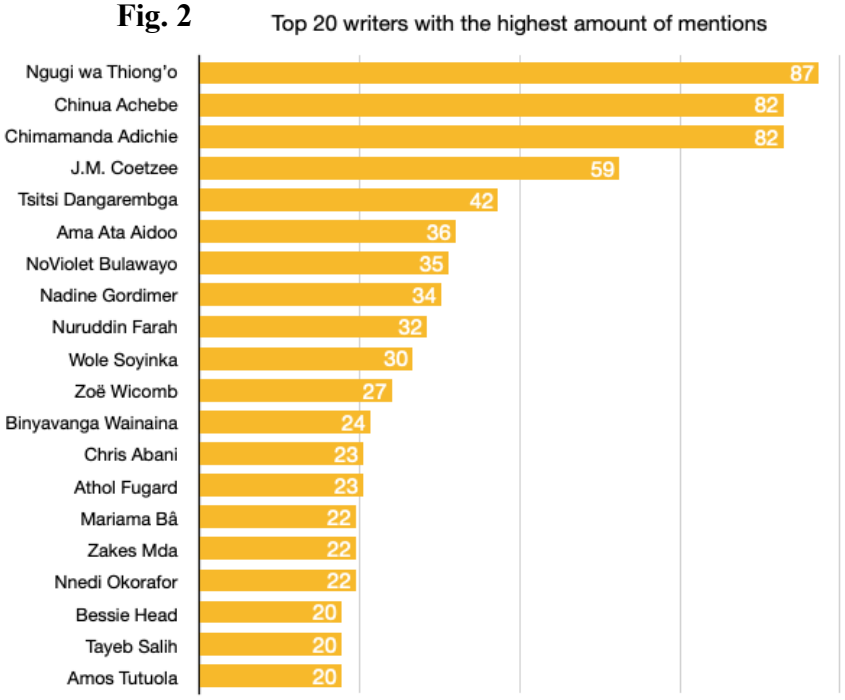
My interest in Adichie's *Americanah* was piqued when I realised, after five years of university-level study in English literature, that I had been assigned the novel in four different classes, at two universities. Out of the whole literary field, my professors had consistently chosen this novel to be representative of something—be it African women's writing, African literature, postcolonial literature, or world literature. Ironically, it seemed that—at least in my own experience at university—a different 'single story' of Africa had taken hold. My anecdotal sense of *Americanah*'s popularity is backed up by some significant research: a 2020 survey of 105 academics teaching African literature by Lily Saint and Bhakti Shringarpure found that *Americanah* is the fourth-most-taught literary text in university courses (fig. 1), while Adichie herself is the joint-second most taught author, tied with Chinua Achebe and just behind Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, both of whom are widely regarded as 'fathers' of African literature (fig. 2).

**Fig. 1**




Source: Lily Saint and Bhakti Shringarpure. "African Literature Is a Country." *Africa Is a Country*, 8 July 2020, https://africasacountry.com/2020/08/african-literature-is-a-country.

**Fig. 2**




Source: Lily Saint and Bhakti Shringarpure. "African Literature Is a Country." *Africa Is a Country*, 8 July 2020, https://africasacountry.com/2020/08/african-literature-is-a-country.

Of the top five novels in Saint and Shringarpure's survey, three are contemporary: in third place, just before *Americanah*, we find NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, while in fifth place is

Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Not only was my intuition regarding *Americanah* backed up by research, but this research showed a grouping of relatively similar contemporary African works all receiving attention in the form of the syllabus.

The most notable similarities are between the two most popular contemporary novels on this list. *We Need New Names* was published in the same year as *Americanah* and deals with strikingly similar subject matter: a young woman emigrates from her country of birth (Zimbabwe in *We Need New Names*, and Nigeria in *Americanah*) to the United States. As I demonstrate below, both novels are also commonly read as semi-autobiographical and have a similar formal structure, which includes an embedded 'text-within-a-text' element. While I analyse *We Need New Names*' reception in its own right, the novel also functions, for these reasons, as a 'control' of sorts to my study of *Americanah*. Regarding *Purple Hibiscus*, although I do make reference to Adichie's first novel in my close reading of her oeuvre in Chapter Three, my focus, alongside *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, will be on Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is in twelfth place in the survey. As a historical novel that deals with the 1960s Biafran War and is set entirely in Nigeria,[1] *Half of a Yellow Sun* provides an interesting comparison to the other two novels in terms of genre and content, as well as allowing for an overview of the development of Adichie's career.

We thus have three works in this literary constellation, with many similarities and some differences, all taught frequently at universities. How have these texts attained their current status, and how can we situate them in a global 'canon' of Anglophone writing? Here I turn to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who conceptualises a symbolic economy of cultural value which operates according to a specific logic (*Distinction* xxiv). Within this economy, various agents are at work, transmitting, acquiring and accumulating cultural capital, or prestige. In order to become a canonical literary work, a novel must be legitimised and be judged prestigious by various

[1] And the nascent, ill-fated state of Biafra.

different agents in the field. These figures include publishers, reviewers, prizegivers and academics. Such agents of legitimation, writes Huggan, "are all contenders in the struggle to validate particular writers; and the writers themselves vie for the right to attain and, in turn, confer recognition and prestige" (5). This cumulative process of legitimation can potentially culminate in what Bourdieu calls "consecration" (*Rules of Art* 217). Wendy Waring claims that these acts of legitimation leave "paratextual traces," which "render the process of cultural production visible" (455) and could include blurbs, select reviews and prizes on the front and back covers, and italicised quotations, among other things. All of these elements gesture to the tension between all the possible readings of a text and the meaning drawn out by the various agents that confer value upon it. My thesis homes in on this point of tension in order to study how institutional forces confer value in the global literary field and, in doing so, guide our readings of the works they consecrate. By studying the consecrating institutions while closely reading the novels to illuminate these differences, I attempt to provide a greater understanding of the constitution of the contemporary world canon, particularly as it relates to the contemporary African novel.

To understand how consecrated works come to form what is commonly referred to as a 'canon,' I draw on John Guillory's authoritative work on the problem of literary canon formation. The canon, a term borrowed from biblical scripture, is generally understood to denote a number of literary texts which are, as Guillory puts it, "preserved, reproduced, and taught in the schools" (6). Despite the canon's symbolic appearance as a unitary list of "great works," there exists no unified, stable and authoritative list; it is for this reason that Guillory defines the canon as "an imaginary totality of works" (30). The syllabus, Guillory argues, posits the existence of this imaginary list, and the canon is "projected out of the multiple individual syllabi functioning within individual pedagogic institutions over a relatively extended period of time" (31).

Even if we take a broader view of the canon beyond the pedagogic imaginary of the syllabus, we find that the institutions that create cultural value (and therefore canonicity, in the long run) often position themselves as registering pre-existing value and canonicity rather than contributing to it themselves. Alongside the syllabus, we see this in such institutional mechanisms as the literary prize. James English argues that the literary prize, rather than explicitly conveying canonicity in the form of cultural capital, claims to merely reward it: "the gift of the prize is meant to be a kind of partial and inadequate affirmation of an achievement that has already been more reliably measured elsewhere and otherwise: a worthy winner (and what prize wants an unworthy winner?) brings her value, and indeed her (future, if not present) canonicity, to the prize, not vice versa" (241). This tacit disavowal of the process of consecration enables canonicity to function as a fetish that obscures the social relations that subtend prestige. Guillory and English's insights highlight issues for efforts to account for cultural value: if the canon does not exist in any directly accessible form, and canonicity always already exists, how can we understand the canon as it relates to an individual literary work?

I suggest that if we regard the agents functioning within the literary field as performing acts of consecration rather than merely registering a work's canonical status, this will allow us to access and make sense of the value and canonicity of a work. Rather than seeing canonisation as the endpoint of literary production, and extending merely from the novel's presence on a syllabus, I propose that it would be more fruitful to examine multiple facets in the process of a work's valuation in order to understand the different and sometimes contrasting ideologies behind the consecration of our chosen texts. For a conceptualisation of a work's canonicity that does not treat the valuation of the academic institution as its telos, I follow a multi-pronged approach based on Wikipedia's five criteria to determine whether a text is 'notable' enough to warrant an entry. This methodology is inspired by Shringarpure, who emphasises Wikipedia's powerful role as a literary gatekeeper, since "[f]or the most part, a book cannot be cited, reviewed, or written about in any capacity unless its availability and description can be found on

Wikipedia" (180). As the world's largest and most read reference work in history, and one that is—significantly—not aligned with any of the institutions under examination, Wikipedia's guidelines provide a useful model to determine what constitutes a novel that is generally understood to be important—if not canonical. Wikipedia's five criteria, of which a book must fulfil at least one in order to merit an entry, are as follows:

> 1. The book has been the subject of two or more non-trivial published works … such as newspaper articles, other books, television documentaries, bestseller lists, and reviews. ...
> 2. The book has won a major literary award.
> 3. The book has been considered by reliable sources to have made a significant contribution to a notable or significant motion picture, or other art form, or event or political or religious movement.
> 4. The book is, or has been, the subject of instruction at two or more schools, colleges, universities or post-graduate programs in any particular country.
> 5. The book's author is so historically significant that any of the author's written works may be considered notable … and the author's life and body of written work would be a common subject of academic study. ("Notability")

These five notability criteria contain five different institutional mechanisms for conferring prestige. Each of these institutional mechanisms, I propose, has its own regime of value, which is embedded in the work during the process of consecration, and then influences how readers interpret the text.

Part I of my thesis, comprising two chapters, outlines how these value-conferring institutions and their value ideologies have made these novels (and authors) canonical. This discourse analysis allows me to ask further questions about how these different institutions of

consecration guide our reading of the texts, particularly for Euro-American readers who use commentary from agents of consecration to contextualise novels. Using this first part of the thesis to show how the writers fulfil the notability criteria gives me license to dive into these writers and examine how they respond to their institutional success. Comprising the next two chapters, Part II therefore shows how the novels push back against an imagined Euro-American reader by resisting readings encouraged by the institutions that bestow cultural capital upon them. I close-read the three novels to examine how Adichie and Bulawayo use metafiction to respond to the institutionalisation of their work and negotiate their own positions—and the position of the African author more generally—in the global literary field.

In Chapter One, inspired by Wikipedia's first and second criteria, I analyse the literary review and literary prize as agents of legitimation. I close-read reviews and prize citations for each novel, identifying trends in these responses to the novels and highlighting instances where they diverge. Alongside this discourse analysis, by situating these institutional mechanisms within the wider cultural economy, I use my case studies to examine how these institutions interact and how they allocate, trade and maintain cultural capital. I identify two major trends in my analysis of the novels' reception by these institutions: an emphasis on the novelists' biography as an indicator of their works' 'authenticity,' and a valuation of the novels' ability to 'beat stereotypes.' At the same time, I find that the 'mainstream' institutions characterise Adichie less as a Nigerian author, and more as an international—or even US author—as her career progresses.

Chapter Two takes cues from criteria four and five to analyse the academic institutions of consecration.[2] Beginning with the fifth criterion, which outlines the need for "the author's life

[2] Regarding Wikipedia's third criterion, I do not focus directly on the manner in which these novels have made a "significant contribution to a notable or significant motion picture, or other art form, or event or political or religious movement" ("Notability"), mainly due to the lack of quantifiable and comparable data. While *Half of a Yellow Sun* was adapted to the screen in 2013, which of course has influenced the novel's reception—and Adichie's reception more generally—(as we see in the uptick in retroactive reviews of *Half of a Yellow Sun* in this period), no such adaptations exist for the other two works. The HBO limited series adaptation of *Americanah* scheduled for 2021 remains—at time of writing—in limbo, and *We Need New Names*, while adapted for the stage, has never been adapted for the screen. While it's worth noting that the existence of these (planned) adaptations functions as further evidence (or indeed, generators) of these novels' canonicity, these different influences cannot be easily compared—

and body of written work … [to] be a common subject of academic study" ("Notability"), I use distant-reading methods to analyse publications in academic journals by keywords on the *MLA International Bibliography* database, in order to detect academic trends in scholarship on Adichie and Bulawayo's work. Following this, I use the database *Open Syllabus*, which compiles university syllabi, to count and analyse the syllabi these novels are assigned on. This dataset expands upon the work of Saint and Shringarpure and allows for an analysis of the syllabi themselves, and the theoretical contexts they provide for these novels. In both the academic articles and syllabi, I pay particular attention to the other texts with which these novels are grouped; this allows me to examine how these different institutional mechanisms situate these novels and novelists in a particular canon of works. As in Chapter One, I find in the academic reception a similar trajectory in Adichie's career, in which, as she accumulates cultural capital, she moves closer to the centre of the literary field. In both 'mainstream' and academic institutions, I identify a relatively stable list of literary works belonging to the larger cluster in which Adichie and Bulawayo's novels have gained prestige on the world stage. Overall, these first two chapters critically examine the context in which these much-celebrated and much-discussed authors have risen to prominence, particularly within the global literary Anglosphere.

Chapter Three reads *Half of a Yellow Sun* alongside *Americanah* in order to ascertain how Adichie herself maps the historical trajectory of Nigerian literature in the global literary field, which ultimately serves to legitimise Adichie's own contribution to the field. I make use of the novels' shared investment in metafiction through their use of author-protagonists to outline how they set up a fictional canon of Nigerian writing, beginning with the 1960s Nigerian literary field described in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and ending with a transnational literary paradigm around the turn of the millennium in *Americanah*. By historicising the Nigerian author and literary work in two distinct time periods, the novels outline the changing ideologies of value in the literary

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and perhaps merit a study of their own as alone-standing works. At the same time, Adichie's status as a symbol of feminism certainly warrants its own study and has been discussed elsewhere (see Lascelles 2021; Pucherová 2022).

market and set the stage for Adichie's entry into the canon, symbolically wresting back control from the agents of legitimation.

In Chapter Four, I reread Adichie's *Americanah* alongside—and in comparison to—Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Both novels utilise their similarly self-reflexive 'text-within-a-text' structures to respond to the institutionalisation of their authors' previous work. The first chapter of *We Need New Names* was originally published as a short story, to great acclaim, winning the Caine Prize for African Writing. After Bulawayo's win, she added several chapters to create the novel *We Need New Names*. In these added chapters, the protagonist moves from Zimbabwe to the United States and develops a critical consciousness of both her childhood in Zimbabwe and the US perception of Africa. I read these additional chapters as a self-conscious reflection on the content, form and success of the short story. *Americanah* stages a similar response to Adichie's canonisation by narrating a Nigerian writer's response to the success of her writing—present in the novel as embedded text—in the United States. By thus demonstrating their awareness of, and responding to the discourses of consecration, these texts 'write back' to the institutional conveyers of cultural capital and stake out their own position in the literary field.

As such, the two parts of my thesis compare how academic and 'mainstream' discourse in the global Anglosphere positions these authors and their novels in relation to how the novelists themselves, through their self-conscious fictionalisation of canon formation, position their work in the global literary field. What remains to be seen is whether these institutions will eventually adapt to take on the criticisms levelled at them by these novelists, 'closing the gap' between the agents of consecration and the works; or whether literary fiction, in its counterdiscursivity, will always remain ahead of the curve. I aim to show how these texts are not simply interpolated by institutions of consecration, but indeed fight back against the 'single story' that is ascribed them and, in doing so, participate in the constitution of a dynamic literary field.

## 1. Reviews and Prizes

This chapter focuses on the literary review and the literary prize, two institutional mechanisms that consecrate literary value. Inspired by Guillory's statement that "[l]iterary works must be seen ... as the vector of ideological notions which do not inhere in the works themselves but in the context of their institutional presentation" (ix), my analysis of these institutions in relation to the three novels I am studying—Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013), and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013)—will identify and highlight the ideological context these institutional mechanisms create for their reception.

Although I analyse these 'mainstream' institutions separately from their 'academic' counterparts, the processes of consecration that form the canon are closely interlinked. Richard Jean So emphasises how the filtering function that reviewers perform determines which books come to be read by the public, including in the seemingly more autonomous sphere of the academy, which tends to see itself as "less responsive to vicissitudes of literary fashion that reviews partly register and sometimes create" (104). Contrary to this, So finds that when we look at the authors to whom reviewers pay the most attention, we find "a striking symmetry with what scholars have largely recognised as the authors most worthy of criticism as well with whom we tend to teach in the classroom," with canonical American figures such as Toni Morrison, Phillip Roth and Maxine Hong Kingston dominating both these lists. We find a similarly overlapping list of African authors in the references made by both 'mainstream' and academic institutional mechanisms in their discussion of Adichie and Bulawayo's novels, forming a literary cluster of contemporary African writers.

The literary prize performs a similar screening function for literature and has similarly unseen effects on the consecration of literary works in academic institutions. English characterises the literary prize as "today the single most powerful instrument for conferring value on a piece of work" (148), with an outsized influence on how "the canon is formed, cultural capital is allocated, 'greatness' is determined" (244). Alexander Manshel et al. describe the

interlinked nature of the prize with other agents in the field, arguing that the prize "crystallizes a variety of other consecrating forces and actors, from the publishers who select and promote a title to the authors who blurb it and the reviewers who praise it" (Manshel et al.). The winnowing function that prizes perform is similarly significant for teachers of contemporary literature who, "in place of a more or less stable canon, can draw annually on the prize lists for new and potentially teachable fiction"" (Manshel et al.). While highlighting the links between these agents, I also draw out the differences in how these institutional mechanisms assign value to the works at hand. In recognition of the crucial filtering function both prizes and reviews perform, my analysis of these mechanisms forms two significant parts of my overall analysis of the process of canonisation, and the places of Adichie and Bulawayo within that canon.

**I. Prizes**

To analyse the discourse surrounding literary prizes in relation to the three novels, I compiled a list of the awards each novel was nominated for or won, and collected statements about each novel by those affiliated with the respective awards. This included prize citations by the judges of the award, introductions by the presenters of the ceremony, and interviews with judges. Despite this broad scope, my corpus of book reviews was significantly larger. For this reason, this chapter focuses mainly on trends I identified in book reviews. The lack of data I managed to collect for literary prizes shows the limitations of the discourse analysis approach and the need for further research to determine the ideologies underpinning prize selection. In recognition of the important role prizes play in literary consecration, however, the following section will explore briefly how cultural capital is traded between prizes and reviews, and then examine a specific prize ceremony for *We Need New Names* to analyse how canonical works are used by prizes to grow their own prestige.

In order to examine the process of consecration, I identified each time a review or prize citation references another review or prize. By elucidating the connections *across* literary reviews and literary prizes, I outline how this institutional network generates and distributes cultural

capital. The reviews contain many references to the prizes that these authors are nominated for or have won, either for the novel at hand or their previous works. Like a positive feedback loop, the very act of a reviewer referencing a prize strengthens that prize's legitimacy. It's crucial to note, however, that cultural capital chiefly circulates between these two institutions by attaching itself to the names of winners and nominees. The frequency by which Adichie, in the reception of *Americanah*, is referred to as an Orange Prize winner (in nine different reviews and one prize citation), or a MacArthur 'Genius' grant recipient (also in nine reviews and one prize citation) gestures to the prestige of these specific awards and their position at the top of the hierarchy of the cultural economy.[3]

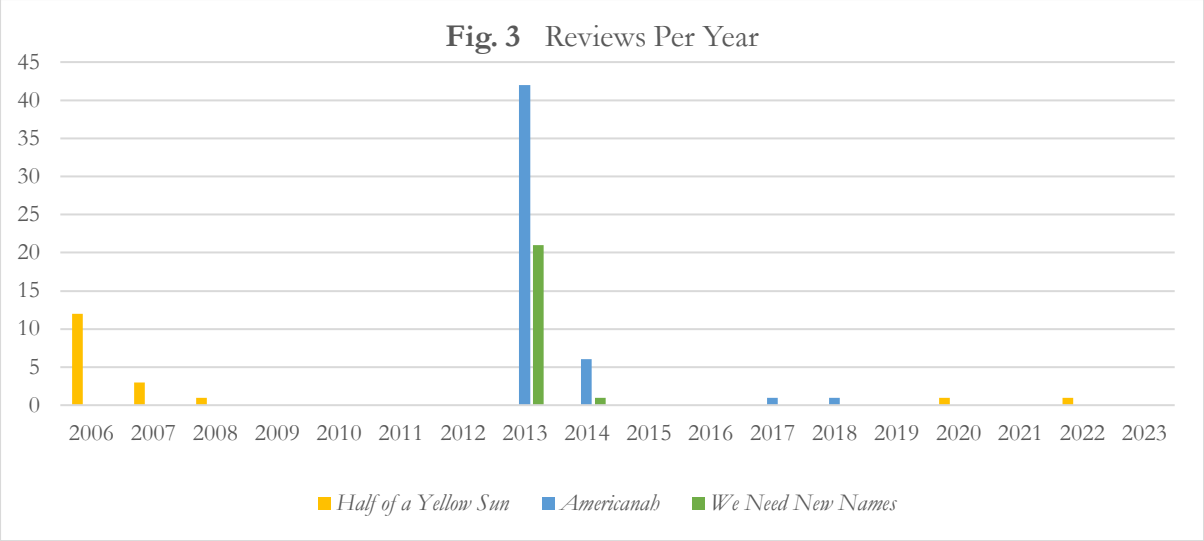
To outline how prizes can generate their own prestige, I analyse the exemplary case of the Etisalat Prize for African Literature, awarded by the Emirati state-owned telecommunications company Etisalat. Before *We Need New Names* was announced as the winner of the inaugural prize at the 2013 ceremony, the audience was shown a slideshow in recognition of the 'Greats' of African literature, comprised of Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Camara Laye and Flora Nwapa, and ending with the Etisalat logo itself. In this explicit form of position-taking, the prize conveys prestige on Bulawayo by inserting her into this pre-existing canon of African literary 'Greats.' At the same moment, the prize inserts *itself* into this canon by insinuating that it has the acumen to identify the next author to be a part of this prestigious list. Corporate prizes like the Etisalat are, as Huggan argues, "a 'gift' that brings publicity to the company while functioning as a symbolic marker of its authorising power" (105). In these double-sided references, the prize conveys cultural capital to both the awarder and the awarded.

**II. Reviews**

[3] Although reviewers constantly reference prizes, they rarely reference other reviewers. The only exception is two references, one for *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and one for *Americanah*, to the *New York Times* review of these novels (McGrath *New York Times*, 23 Sep 2006; Lofton *Mississippi Business Journal*, 2 May 2014). These exceptional references point to the dominant position of the *New York Times* in the US literary field; it shows, as So remarks, that "[n]ot all book reviews are equal" (73).

In order to construct a corpus of book reviews for each novel, I consulted three databases: *Gale Literature Book Review Index*, *H. W. Wilson Book Review Digest Plus*, and *Bookmarks*. Both *Gale* and *Wilson* gather English-language book reviews in US, British and Canadian publications. While *Gale* has a relatively extensive scope, *Wilson*'s selective focus on "serious reviews by qualified experts" ("Book Review Digest"), means that its database is narrower than *Gale*'s but contains a more comprehensive body of 'serious' literary reviews. *Bookmarks* largely collects US reviews but is not restricted to mid-Atlantic publications, adding a more global dimension to the corpus. The corpus is not exhaustive; it is limited by the metadata of my chosen databases and the self-imposed limitations of my study, therefore focused on English-language reviews published overwhelmingly in the United States and United Kingdom. Despite these limitations, this corpus offers a useful representation of the reception of these novels, both qualitatively and—to a more limited extent—quantitively. By close-reading these reviews, I identify trends in commentary on the novels—trends which show to how these novels are discursively situated in the literary field, and which indicate the ideologies that permeate the reception of these novelists.

While each novel was nominated for and won several major prizes, and all three were reviewed in prestigious US and UK publications, *Americanah* received by far the most reviews (fifty-five) in comparison to *Half of a Yellow Sun* (seventeen) and *We Need New Names* (twenty-two) across a wide range of publications (see fig. 3).




Source: *Gale Literature Book Review Index*, *H. W. Wilson Book Review Digest Plus*, and *Bookmarks*.

This quantitative difference between *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* could be due to the fact that the reviews for *Half of a Yellow Sun* (published some seven years earlier) are less accessible online. If that is a factor, the disparity between *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* is more telling, with both novels published in 2013. Significantly however, this imbalance in reviews is not reflected when it comes to literary awards: while *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *We Need New Names* both won four prizes and were nominated for four and three respectively (with Bulawayo shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker in 2013), *Americanah* only won two prizes and was nominated for three. Clearly, attention from the field in the form of reviews doesn't correlate exactly with accolades.

Apart from the development of online journalism, there are two other factors to make sense of the numerical disparity between *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. The first (and most obvious) is Adichie's extraliterary celebrity following the success of her two widely circulated TED Talks in 2009 ("The Danger of a Single Story") and 2012 ("We Should All Be Feminists"), which allowed her to become something of a household name in the global Anglosphere. Furthermore, following *Americanah*'s publication in May of 2013, parts of "We Should All Be Feminists" were sampled in Beyoncé's song "Flawless" in December of the same year,

introducing Adichie to a whole new global audience. With these major successes under her belt, Adichie generated more traction with *Americanah*.

Putting aside Adichie's career trajectory for a moment, the disparity between the number of reviews for her two novels—and the corresponding gap between literary reviewers and literary prizegivers—contradicts a commonly held belief about the reception of African literature in the West. This perspective is aptly summarised in author Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical piece "How to Write about Africa," in which he describes the literature about Africa that becomes popular in the West. Among his advice is to "[n]ever have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it" (92), instead "any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the 'real Africa,' and you want that on your dust jacket" (94). Indeed, rather than including "ordinary domestic scenes" or "love between Africans (unless a death is involved)" (92), Wainaina advises the writer to "include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West" (93). Wainaina's acerbic critique, which suggests that authors are rewarded by literary institutions in the West for representing African suffering and other stereotypes about the continent, has become somewhat canonical itself. Indeed, it has many parallels with Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story," condemning the 'single story of catastrophe' in representations of Africa. This critique, however, does not reflect the levels of relative success achieved by works from Adichie's oeuvre. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a historical novel largely dealing with the atrocities of the Biafran War, is under-reviewed compared to Adichie's meditation on middle-class Nigerian emigration in *Americanah*. By translating difference into terms familiar to metropolitan audiences (Huggan 14), the mode of representation Wainaina outlines is a form of exoticism, yet in this case it is not operative either in representation or in the system of rewards, indicating a different regime of value than what Huggan identifies as the postcolonial exotic.

It is hard to conclude from the limited data concerning one author that Wainaina's critique is no longer relevant. Indeed, it is possible to find some of the discourse he criticises in

the language of the reviewers, particularly regarding representations of the 'real Africa.' What I will argue, however, is that Wainaina's critique has—at least in part—been absorbed by the Western reviewership, and that there is a marked interest in rewarding novels that beat stereotypes about Africa rather than confirm them. This idea I explore further through my close reading, mainly in relation to the dominant through line in these reviews: the question of how to write about Africa. This discourse is commonly evoked by the reviewers of both Bulawayo and Adichie in two keys ways: firstly, an imperative for 'authenticity' linked to the author's biography; and second, as I have mentioned, an imperative to beat stereotypes. Before addressing the latter, which inserts itself in the discourse as typified by Wainaina, I examine the first theme as a reviewer strategy which outlines *who* can write about Africa.

*Biography and authenticity*

A significant trend in reviews for all three novels is their focus on authorly biography and identity, and the inevitable connection of these with authenticity—an 'authentic' representation of Africa or the diasporic experience. Within this discourse there is an inherent suspicion about who is—and who is not—equipped to write about Africa authentically. To an extent, the prevalence of this discourse in the novels' reception can be explained; *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* are in part autobiographical. In this sense, Adichie and Bulawayo's respective biography plays a major role in contextualising the novels. Furthermore, biographical details are often used in the marketing of novels as a kind of hook to catch a potential reader's attention.

At the same time, however, the reviewers' focus on these elements to the exclusion of other points gestures to something else at work. Susan Hawthorne argues that works by ethnic minority writers—particularly when those writers are women—are overwhelmingly marketed as autobiographical. Even when these writers produce work that is not some form of autobiography, "their attempts to universalize their experience (have tended all too often to be) reduced to the particularities of a lived life" (Hawthorne 262). Huggan forges a link between the autobiographical imperative for minoritised writers that Hawthorne describes and a nostalgia, on

the behalf of the dominant culture, for a perceived lost authenticity. He argues that "ethnic autobiography provides the basis for a redemptive exploration of a putatively threatened cultural authenticity—an authenticity, however not so much recuperated as retranslated to meet the dominant culture's needs" (Huggan 156). In the field of postcolonial literature, then, authenticity circulates as a "rarified object[…] in a late-capitalist currency of symbolic exchange" (Huggan 29). While this commodified authenticity is still easily identifiable in the reviews, it is expressed less as a nostalgia than a pervasive anxiety about who is able to represent certain experiences.

The focus on biographical evidence as a marker of the novel's authenticity features most prominently in reviews of *Americanah*, although it surfaces frequently in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *We Need New Names* as well. Reviewers of *Half of a Yellow Sun* emphasise Adichie's connection to Nigeria, with several outlining the author's childhood in relation to the events of the novel. Janet Maslin's review for *The New York Times* (19 May 2013) exemplifies this connection, stating that "[Adichie's] Nigerian upbringing may account for why Olanna and Kainene's family is so well drawn" (only qualifying this by adding that "She has also read extensively about Nigeria"). In reviews of *Americanah*, we find the same logic linking biography and authenticity at work, albeit modified: rather than just emphasising Adichie's connection to Nigeria, the reviewers highlight her 'authentic' Nigerian identity alongside her experiences in the USA. Laura Pearson in *The Chicago Tribune* (28 June 2013) exemplifies this, attributing Adichie's "vivid descriptions about the often lonely, disorienting experience of adjusting to a foreign country to the fact that 'she, too, is from Nigeria and has lived in the U.S.'" While reviewers of *Half of a Yellow Sun* use Adichie's biography to justify her claim to representing Nigeria, *Americanah*'s reviewers highlight her 'authentic' diasporic subjectivity. In the latter case, the reviewers are interested in showing her claim to both locales—that is, her globalised credentials.

Rhetoric in a similar vein to that in reviews of *Americanah* emerges in reviews for *We Need New Names*, in which, for example, Ryan Lenora Brown in *The Christian Science Monitor* (27 May 2013) writes, "[u]nsurprisingly, given the intimate character of her prose, Bulawayo herself is a

Zimbabwean immigrant to the United States." Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* (15 May 2013) takes this logic even further in her discussion of the chapters in *We Need New Names* that attempt to address the more general immigrant experience by using the plural pronoun 'we':

> Such generalizations are the one misstep in this otherwise stunning novel. Not only because they try to project one point of view onto the experiences of a wide and varied group of immigrants, but also because they are not always true. For instance, the remarkably talented author of this book, the novel's jacket tells us, was 'born and raised in Zimbabwe,' and moved to the United States, where she earned an M.F.A. from Cornell and is now a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford—which sounds very much like a dream achieved.

Here the novel's divergence from its author's biography is posed as a problem in itself—a misstep in representing a 'true' diasporic experience. Kakutani's review exemplifies Hawthorne's observation that any attempt by the ethnic minority author to universalise their experiences will inexorably lead them back to a reinforced autobiography in their reception. Although the author's biography forms an important element to any contextualising effort—it is, as Kakutani notes, almost always present on the dust jacket—the manner in which it is consistently highlighted by these reviewers gives the impression that we are being reassured of the writer's claim to represent their subject matter.[4]

This anxious move to reassurance indicates the contested terrain of African representation. Whether it be a purely African subject matter, as in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, or a mixture of African setting with a diasporic African narrative, as in the other two novels, these reviews tell us that not everyone can or should write about these things. This anxiety can be situated in the context of the larger debate raging in the media at this time about cultural appropriation in fiction. A key moment in this debate was American writer Lionel Shriver's

[4] Except of course in Kakutani's case, who, rather than reassure us, sows doubt.

controversial and highly publicised keynote speech on fiction and identity politics at a literary event in Brisbane in 2016, in which the author decried identity politics and accusations of "cultural appropriation" as threatening the novelist's right to write fiction from the perspective of different characters (Malik). The writer Yassmin Abdel-Magied walked out of the speech in protest, and penned a response, in which she states that people should only write within the confines of their experience and identity, arguing (topically) that it is "not always OK if a white guy writes the story of a Nigerian woman because the actual Nigerian woman can't get published or reviewed to begin with" (Abdel-Magied). It is in this heated cultural moment and between the two (perhaps extreme) positions represented by Shriver and Abdel-Magied that the reviewers must thread a fine line. Indeed, what we see in the reviews—particularly for Bulawayo—is the latter stance functioning as a kind of trap, in which the minoritised author who does get published and reviewed being nevertheless hemmed in by her personal experience and identity. As I will explore in Chapters Three and Four, it is this trap of the autobiographical imperative, as well as the connected need for authenticity, that Adichie and Bulawayo respond to in their protagonists.

*Movement in the Literary Field*

Within this context of the contested terrain of African representation, the second significant finding in these reviews is the move from emphasising Adichie's purely Nigerian credentials to her American biography as well. The fact that reviews for *We Need New Names* also emphasise Bulawayo's American biography would seem to indicate that this change in Adichie's reception is due to the content of her novels. After all, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set solely in Nigeria, while around half of both *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* takes place in the US. When we examine the literary works these three novels are compared to in the reviews, however, we find a similar shift from a firmly Nigerian literary context with *Half of a Yellow Sun* to a more US context with *Americanah*, while the reviews for *We Need New Names* do not exhibit the same American literary references. This indicates that Adichie's change in identification in the reviewership is not

solely due to her novels' subject matter, but rather is representative of wider structural changes concerning Adichie's reception in the global literary Anglosphere.

Just as professors and writers of 'great book' lists, reviewers also invoke canons, albeit implicitly, by comparing the reviewed novel to other authors or works. From a Bourdieusian point of view, these comparisons are a means of conferring cultural capital onto the reviewed novel by associating it with other prestigious works. In their choice of references, reviewers situate the novels in a particular literary tradition, thereby influencing the way the novel is read and perceived more broadly. By identifying the canons these reviewers tacitly construct, I further emphasise Adichie's unique trajectory in the literary field.

Regarding *Half of a Yellow Sun*, these comparisons to other works often form a central concern for many of the reviewers, who strongly emphasise situating Adichie in the literary field. In terms of the writers to whom Adichie is mainly compared in these reviews, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is sorted into two generic categories: the 'war novel,' and the 'Nigerian novel' (see fig. 4).

**Fig. 4** Reviewers' canons: *Half of a Yellow Sun*


Source: *Gale Literature Book Review Index*, *H. W. Wilson Book Review Digest Plus*, and *Bookmarks*.

We find allusions to Tolstoy (Cheuse, *NPR*, 4 Oct. 2006), Tom Bissel's writing on the Vietnam War (Nixon *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2006), Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Maslin *New York Times*, 21 Sep. 2006) and Helen Dunmore's depiction of the Leningrad blockade, *The Siege* (Jaggi *Guardian*, 19 Aug. 2006). These references are diverse, united mainly by the category of 'war

literature' and the fact that they are all belong to the Euro-American canon, rather than a wider 'postcolonial' or global corpus.

Despite this general dearth of references to postcolonial war writers, we find an overwhelming number (seventy-four percent total) of references to other Nigerian writers, with many reviewers implicitly evoking the 'generational model' of Nigerian literary history to situate Adichie in the literary field. Nixon writes that "Adichie … belongs to a new generation of talented young Nigerian writers: Helon Habila, Uzodinma Iweala, Helen Oyeyemi and Chris Abani" (*New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2006), while White evokes a similar list of "Nigeria's new crop of wonderful writers," including Habila, Abani and Sefi Atta (*Women's Review,* May 2007). Cheuse contextualises this new canon in terms of Nigeria's literary 'Greats' of the mid-twentieth century: "Having already produced such writers as novelist Chinua Achebe and playwright, essayist, and novelist Wole Soyinka, [Nigeria] has lately sent a new generation of wonderful fiction writers such as Chris Abani and Helon Habila out into the world of American publishing. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is another, even younger, such rising star" (*NPR*, 4 Oct. 2006).

Alongside Abani and Habila, the associations with Achebe in particular abound in these reviews. Here we see a distinct overlap between the categories of 'war novel' and 'Nigerian novel': the reviewers are particularly interested in constructing a canon of Nigerian writers who addressed the Biafran War. Adichie secures "her place in literary history" (John *Black Issues,* Jan. 2007) by "writ[ing] into a rich tradition" of Biafra novels (White *Women's Review,* May 2007), thus inheriting the "mantle of the likes of Achebe and Soyinka" (VanZanten Gallagher *Books & Culture*, Jan. 2008). Once again, there are notably few references to a wider African or 'postcolonial' canon. When not read purely as a through the lens of its genre as a 'war novel,' *Half of a Yellow Sun* is placed firmly within the Nigerian literary canon. We see a clear interest in delineating this canon on very specific terms, with references to the same forefathers (Achebe and Soyinka) and the same contemporaries (Abani and Habila). In the narrowness of these references, the Nigerian canon these reviews construct is rather circumscribed.

The emphasis on the Nigerian canon we see in *Half of a Yellow Sun* juxtaposes references made in reviews for *Americanah*, in which Adichie's place in the Nigerian literary field takes on a much less central role. Rather, Adichie becomes part of a canon of global authors—particularly those writing within the United States (see fig. 5).

**Fig. 5** Reviewers' canons: *Americanah*


Source: *Gale Literature Book Review Index*, *H. W. Wilson Book Review Digest Plus*, and *Bookmarks*.

This Adichie is part of "the canon of contemporary immigrant literature" (Corrigan *NPR*, 15 May 2013) which includes writers such as "Junot Diaz, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gary Shteyngart, Chang-rae Lee, Dinaw Mengestu and Susan Choi" (Raboteau *Washington Post*, 20 June 2013), and novels such as Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club,* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (Schulz *Vulture*, 26 May 2013). The only two Nigerian writers that are mentioned in relation to *Americanah* are Achebe and Teju Cole.[5] The comparisons with Achebe have been incessant throughout Adichie's career, and this shows that even when her global identity is emphasised over her Nigerianness, Achebe remains a firm reference point in her critical reception. US writers are also a major reference point, with figures such as Hilary Mantel and Cormac McCarthy (Sweeney *America,* 13 Oct. 2014), Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, John Updike and Johnathan Franzen (Franklin *Bookforum*, June 2013) cropping up fairly frequently. Kathryn

[5] Teju Cole is another transnational author whose novels are even less easily categorised in national terms than Adichie's—of the two novels he had published by 2013, while *Every Day is for the Thief* is generically a novel of postcolonial return set mainly in Nigeria, his most celebrated novel, *Open City*, takes place entirely outside of Africa—mainly in New York and Brussels.

Schulz's review negotiates between the two canons into which *Americanah* has been inserted, arguing that rather than "a Great American Novel," it would be better classified "an early, imperfect, admirable stab at something new: a Great Global Novel" (*Vulture*, 26 May 2013). Schulz thus summarises the two major impulses in *Americanah*'s reception: its status as both a global novel and an (almost) American novel. Even if we take its thematisation of the USA into account, the fact that *Americanah* is so rarely classed as a Nigerian novel is striking. After all, some forty percent of the novel take place in Nigeria. Even the title, despite its reference to America, is in Nigerian slang.

That the reviewers' canons for Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* do not exhibit this clear US tilt makes Adichie's trajectory all the more remarkable (see fig. 6).

**Fig. 6** Reviewers' canons: *We Need New Names*


Source: *Gale Literature Book Review Index*, *H. W. Wilson Book Review Digest Plus*, and *Bookmarks*.

Rather, Bulawayo is contextualised almost overwhelmingly through references to other African authors, including canonical Zimbabwean writers like Doris Lessing and Tsitsi Dangarembga (Al-Shawaf *Boston Globe*, 5 June 2013) and other African authors such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Freeman *Star Tribune*, 10 Aug. 2013) and Taiye Selasi (Hewett *Women's Review*, May-June 2014). There are several allusions to Adichie in these ranks, suggesting that Bulawayo benefits from the association with her more established and highly consecrated contemporary. We find only a single reference to an author not associated with Africa: the Iranian American novelist Laleh Khadivi, who is characterised as an immigrant writer (Scholes *TLS*, 13 Sept. 2013). The fact that

*We Need New Names* is so overwhelmingly identified with Zimbabwe and the greater African literary field reinforces the cogency of the findings on Adichie.

There is therefore a distinct transition in Adichie's career from a Nigerian writer (or if not Nigerian, genre writer), to globalised writer who is equally a part of the US canon as the world canon. This transition is reflected in the biographical information the reviewers provide, which for *Half of a Yellow Sun*, strongly emphasises Adichie's Nigerian identity, while for *Americanah* highlights her transnational, globalised side. As we will see in Chapter Two, this trajectory is also reflected in the academic reception of Adichie's work. Adichie's transition reflects what English identifies as the "deterritorialization of prestige" in relation to the cultural economy of the prize (282). In regard to "regional" authors winning prizes and thereby gaining cultural capital, English argues that "[t]heir symbolic elevation occur[s] simultaneously with their geographic delocalization" (281). In Adichie, we see this "ambiguous trajectory" (281) reflected in the denationalisation of her position in the literary field and her uncoupling from the specific canon of the nation.

*Beating Stereotypes*

The anxiety regarding identity and authenticity expressed in the reviewers' focus on Bulawayo and Adichie's biographies resurfaces in their discussion of stereotypes, particularly in relation to Western-coded representations of Africa. Whereas previously, reviewers used these strategies to designate *who* should be writing Africa, here we find a normative emphasis on *how* Africa should be written. In their vilification of stereotypical Western representations of Africa, the reviewers align themselves with the same concerns expressed by Adichie in "The Danger of a Single Story" and Wainaina in "How to Write about Africa." However, just as with the reviewers' emphasis on identity in their reception of Adichie and Bulawayo's works, their alignment with Wainaina's critiques functions as a kind of trap by conveying a normative idea of "[h]ow to [w]rite about Africa."

This question surfaces most prominently in *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*. In *Americanah*'s reviews, the novel is commonly praised for the way in which it manages to "sidestep cliché" (Maunsell *Standard*, 4 April 2013), for not being "[t]he generally known immigration story, especially for an African immigrant," which involves "leaving war or poverty" (Davidson *New Yorker*, 9 March 2013). The absorption of Wainaina's 'postcolonial' critique of representation is exemplified by Michael Christie, who goes so far as to do his own 'postcolonial' reading of the novel, invoking the classic colonial (and much-maligned) Rudyard Kipling to show how *Americanah* 'writes back' to Western perceptions and representations:

> 'Some of the people we met had nothing, absolutely nothing, but they were so happy,' Kimberly says of a trip she had taken to India. Through Ifemelu's eyes we see how reductive these sorts of statements are, how ascribing 'simple' happiness to an entire population is nearly as ignorant as saying they are savage or stupid – as Rudyard Kipling once infamously described Africans: 'half-devil, half-child.' (*Global Mail*, 17 May 2013).

The marked interest in avoiding misrepresentations and 'writing back' to Western representations we see in *Americanah*'s critical reception is even more pronounced in reviews of *We Need New Names*. Here, the question of how to represent Africa takes centre stage.

In the critical response to *We Need New Names*, we see a general valorisation of the novel for defying representations of "the poverty-stricken Africa of the old stereotypes, a place whose people know nothing more than the bounds of their own deprivation" (Iweala *New York Times*, 7 June 2013). More often than not, the question of representing Africa invokes the news as its ideological opposite, wherein reviewers define African novelists in negative relation to the Western media. In this paradigm, African literature is valued "for its ability to transport us beyond the headlines" (Habila *Guardian*, 20 June 2013). This trend is epitomised by Judy Wertheimer, who writes: "Darling … gives us a sense of what it feels like to be one of those children staring out of those photographs charitable organizations trot out to get you to give

money to African causes. That, and what it feels like to be caught by the lens of CNN or the BBC at a bad moment" (*The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 7 July 2013).

In Habila's review of *We Need New Names* (*Guardian*, 20 June 2013), this aspect of the novel becomes even more central; however, Habila sees Bulawayo as directly conforming to these very same stereotypes. Habila accuses the novel of "performing Africa," a practice he defines as "inundat[ing] one's writing with images and symbols and allusions that evoke, to borrow a phrase from Aristotle, pity and fear, but not in a real tragic sense, more in a CNN, western-media-coverage-of-Africa, poverty-porn sense." He continues: "There is a palpable anxiety to cover every 'African' topic; almost as if the writer had a checklist made from the morning's news on Africa" (Habila). Despite using it to opposite effect, Habila aligns closely with Wainaina's language just as the positive reviews did. The quoted reviews indicate how the imposition of a normative sense of 'how to write about Africa' might, rather than liberating writers from the yoke of Western representation, impose a different kind of norm on these writers. Indeed, the relentless need for avoiding stereotypes and expressing both novelty and 'authenticity' gesture to a new kind of exploitation.

The reviewers' investment in beating stereotypes and going beyond the headlines speaks to the dominant trend Aaron Bady identifies in Africanist discourse, that "going beyond the clichés has itself become a kind of cliché" ("White Men's Country" 1). Bady argues that "attacking the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination" has become a kind of fetish object which precedes "the inevitable call to go 'beyond' the stereotypes" ("White Men's Country" 12). Achebe's famous 1975 critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which he decries the Victorian novelist's misrepresentation of Africa as a mere negation of Europe, has come to set "the terms through which the function and use of African literature have been theorized" ("White Men's Country" 2). In the reviewers' focus on representing (and misrepresenting) Africa, we see that this primal debate between Conrad and Achebe is the same debate through which Adichie and Bulawayo's novels have been focalised since their publication

by this non-academic literary institution. As we can see in its prevalence in the reviews, this discourse has gone mainstream, and "is no longer anything like the controversial polemic that it was when Achebe wrote his angry indictment" (Bady "White Men's Country" 12). Beyond the striking similarities between the language Bady describes and the language evoked by the reviewers in their valorisation of the novels' successful sidestepping of cliché (or, in Habila case, condemnation for its failure to do so), we can recognise the utility for the institutions in invoking this (by now) profoundly non-transgressive counter-discourse. In setting up a hypothetical dominant canon of Western (mis)representations of Africa, vaguely symbolised through reference to 'Western media' and 'NGO organisations,' and by valorising the counter-discourse they read into these novels, these institutions can signal their own investment in (and valuation of) transgressive representational practices regarding Africa—at least within the West.

If we are to remain vigilant of the intentions behind the investment of foreign cultural (and economic) capital into emerging cultural markets like those of Nigeria or Zimbabwe, the aforementioned reviews suggest that these are not manifest in the perpetuation of stereotyped representations of African war, poverty, disease or 'darkness.' Rather than the reviewers promoting this 'single story,' it is the negation of this postulated Western representation of Africa that presently defines the critical discourse. Since this counter-discourse seems to form a dominant trend in the critical focalisation of these novels in the Anglo-American context, Bady attends to the ideology that underpins it, pointing out the similarities between the literary discourse of refuting the war-torn, poverty-stricken Africa of the media (and *Heart of Darkness*) with the efforts of the global investment class to "re-brand" Africa as "a site of futurity, growth and potential" since the 1990s ("White Men's Country" 15). Citing numerous publications that appeared in the same timeframe as the novels in this study, Bady gestures to the mainstreaming of these positive affirmations of Africa's potential, in titles such as Charlayne Hunter-Gault's *New News Out of Africa: Uncovering Africa's Renaissance* or *The Economist*'s December 3, 2011 cover article "Africa Rising: The Hopeful Continent" ("White Men's Country" 15). While we should be

sceptical of 'reading off' superstructural contradictions from the organization of the economic base, the interlinked nature of cultural and economic capital is—at least to an extent—undeniable, and Bady presents a convincing argument for the homology of this narrative in both economic and cultural terms. While this positive vision of Africa is perhaps difficult to identify in *We Need New Names*, I argue in Chapter Three that Adichie's work, particularly *Americanah*, typifies this narrative of African renaissance so popular around this time. While this regime of value seems to favour 'positive' and 'non-Western-coded' representations of Africa, it contradictorily rewards those who fulfil these criteria, like Adichie, by incorporating them into US and global literature.

This chapter has identified two discourses which the reviewers value in these novels and through which they guide their audiences' reading of the text. The reviewers' emphasis on both biography and on 'beating stereotypes,' despite arising from emancipatory discourse on identity and postcolonial representation, both appear to function as a trap for these authors, who must represent 'Africa' and the 'African experience' in a specific way to be legitimised. Both of these discourses rely on a conception of 'authentic writing' that has the potential to restrict the authors concerned. In the next chapter, I examine how these concerns are expressed in the academy, as well as further analysing Adichie's trajectory in the literary field. Finally, in Chapter Four, I read these novels as responding to these expectations of authenticity in their reception.

## 2. Scholarship and Syllabus

This chapter examines the academic publication and the university syllabus as agents of consecration in the literary field in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*. Although Guillory regards the syllabus as the privileged node through which we can access the canon, my study favours a multi-pronged approach which sees valuation not as a teleological process but rather as a cumulative affair, with different novels receiving different amounts of attention and cultural capital from different agents in the field. While often produced by the same individuals, the academic article and the syllabus fulfil different purposes, and the data I gather differs between the two due to their different goals and audiences. Created by academics in their capacity as researchers, academic writing presumes an audience of interested specialists, and generally positions itself as an original contribution to a broader corpus of writing. The syllabus is created for pedagogical reasons for an audience of students who may not be experts in the field (although it may also help advance a professor's research). Works selected for a syllabus take on a more representative role in relation to the stated learning goals of the course. If we see individual 'canons' arising from both of these institutional mechanisms, as we did with the review and the prize, the canon that the syllabus posits will necessarily be more restricted due to the need for works to be 'representative' of an author, movement, literary style or region. Scholars need not impose these restrictions on the pool of works they draw upon, not being limited by their students' attention and the length of a university course.

Although these two indices of the canon may therefore not be directly comparable, there is a significant advantage to analysing them side-by-side. Despite their different targets, both institutional mechanisms are produced by the same people working in the same institutions. Academic writing, being more "language rich" as So puts it, is useful in making sense of the ideologies underlying certain choices in the syllabus, allowing us to better "track the evolution of discourses of consecration, subtle and not-so-subtle shifts in how scholarly 'experts' value

different types of texts" (So 147). Together, these two agents of consecration provide a useful academic contrast to the 'mainstream' agents I analyse in Chapter One.

In order to construct a corpus of academic works, I compiled publications tagged with the name of each novel from the *Modern Language Association International Bibliography* (*MLA*), which is an annual bibliography of books and articles concerning modern languages and literature with a global scope, containing more than three million individual publications. ("About the MLA"). Produced by the United States' foremost professional organisation for scholars in language and literature, the *MLA* database has been described as "the most comprehensive bibliography of its kind" ("EBSCO"). My analysis of this corpus includes a quantitative review of the publications about each novel, accounting for the number of entries each year since each novel's year of publication. I briefly discuss the key interpretative terms with which the journal articles and other scholarly publications are tagged, in order to gesture towards the analytic lens these novels are commonly read through. I also use the *MLA* corpus to analyse the other literary works tagged in the publications, which allows me to reconstruct how the academy situates the novels at hand in a particular canon of works.

My corpus of syllabi is constructed using the online database *Open Syllabus*, which compiles searchable English-language syllabi from across the world. Performing a similar quantitative analysis of frequency of appearances, works that are assigned alongside the texts, and key interpretative terms that appear in the syllabi's titles, I compare the data I gather with that of both the scholarly articles and the mainstream reviews. I also make further comparison to Saint and Shringarpure's aforementioned survey of academics in the field of African literature. While a corpus derived from *Open Syllabus* may provide a less focused view of the field than Saint and Shringarpure's survey, in which the data were collected mainly from academics that were listed members of the African Literature Association, it also has two clear advantages. Firstly, the metadata—which are composed of twenty-one million English-language syllabi—provide a much broader view of the field, and includes academics that have assigned one of these three

novels but may not necessarily associate professionally with 'African literature' as a whole. *Open Syllabus* does not have access to all English-language syllabi—it builds its corpus primarily by trawling publicly accessible university websites, as well as through faculty contributions—but the breadth of its scope still makes it a significant resource, estimated to have captured "around 6% [of] the US curricular universe over the past several years" ("What is Open Syllabus?"). The second advantage is that *Open Syllabus* has data until 2024, unlike Saint and Shringarpure's survey, which ends in 2020. A caveat here is, as *Open Syllabus* notes, that the collection size always lags for the current year. Indeed, in my survey of the syllabi there appears to be a lag of several years in the database's collection of syllabi. Mainly this is evidenced by the massive drop in syllabus appearances for all three novels in 2020. Despite these limiting factors, the *Open Syllabus* data provide a valuable complement to the work done by Saint and Shringarpure by widening the scope of investigation. I discuss the results of this research in relation to two overarching trends in the corpus. Firstly, I discuss quantitative results and the texts assigned alongside the novels in the syllabi in relation to postcolonial studies as a discipline. This is followed by an analysis of the scholarly 'canons,' which will lead into a further discussion of Adichie's trajectory within the field and the formation of 'literary clusters,'

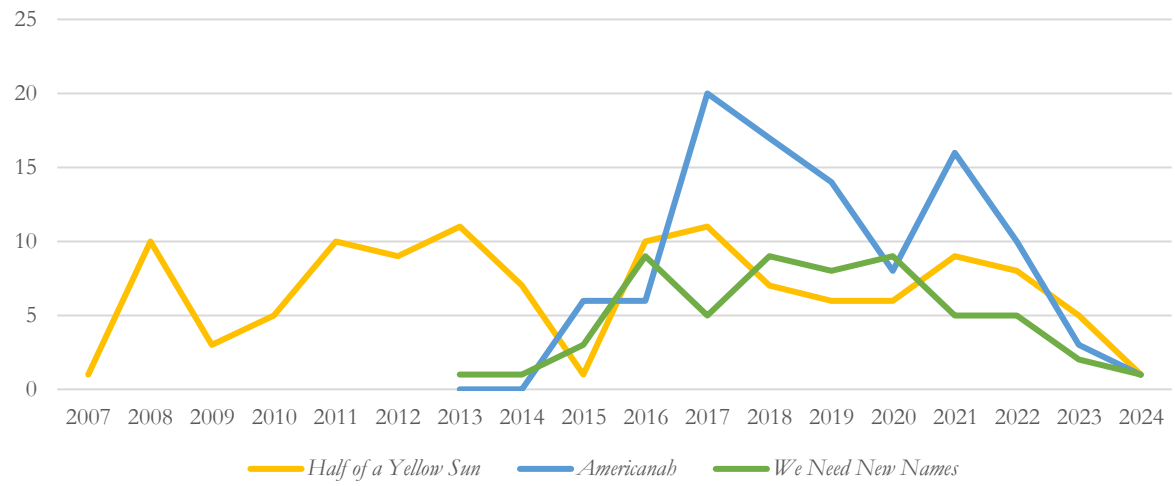
**I. Postcolonial Studies**

*Scholarship*

Beginning with a quantitative analysis of the *MLA* corpus, we find that *Half of a Yellow Sun* has the most publications overall, with 121 unique works of literary criticism on the novel. This is perhaps unsurprising due to its seven-year head start on the other two novels in my study. As we see in fig. 7, however, while *We Need New Names* has a similar rate of publication to *Half of a Yellow Sun* between 2013 and 2023, accounting for its total of fifty-eight scholarly works, the

scholarly interest in *Americanah* has much higher peaks than either novel between 2017 and 2021.

**Fig. 7** Novels by yearly *MLA* publication




Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*.

This accounts for *Americanah*'s 101 overall scholarly publications, almost matching *Half of a Yellow Sun*, despite its seven-year handicap. As is apparent in the figure, these data are rather noisy, due in part to the relatively small sample sizes. Therefore, in terms of an average rate of publication per year, *Americanah* has a rate of 9.2, *Half of a Yellow Sun* has a rate of 6.7, and *We Need New Names* has a rate of 5.3. Since its publication then, *Americanah* has received by far the most scholarly attention of the three. This mirrors the reviewers' outsized interest in *Americanah* in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *We Need New Names*. In literary awards and, as we will see, syllabus appearances, this imbalance is less perceptible, but both 'mainstream' and academic publications appear to favour Adichie's third novel.

In the first chapter, I discussed how this trend in mainstream publishing seems to defy the paradigm of stereotyped African suffering set forth by Wainaina's "How to Write about Africa." In contrast, scholars' preference for a narrative like *Americanah* over one like *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been much discussed. Although, as Shringarpure writes in her study of the influence of the Cold War in the US academy, literary representation of postcolonial conflict—such as we find in *Half of a Yellow Sun*—is a widespread phenomenon, this topic is curiously

absent "as a dominant and pivotal component in postcolonial studies" (128). Shringarpure suggests that the cultural Cold War in the United States "sanitiz[ed] radical discourses and ma[de] them palatable within an academic setting," creating what is to this day "a very de-politicized realm of postcoloniality" (128). This has had the effect of "advanc[ing] certain types of styles and narratives in Anglophone writing" (138), ones which for the most part do not engage with "the postcolonial phenomenon called the Cold War" (Shringarpure 128). Indeed, "[c]ontemporary academic literary culture nurtures and propagates an entirely different body of postcolonial writing," one that focuses "on metropolitan narratives that privilege the experiences of displacement, multiculturalism, and hybrid identities" (Shringarpure 128). Following Shringarpure's observation, a metropolitan narrative of displacement such as *Americanah* would, in a postcolonial studies setting, be privileged over a novel that deals directly with Cold War conflict like *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Neil Lazarus similarly claims that the reason literary scholars working in postcolonial studies "have tended to write with reference to a woefully restricted and attenuated corpus of works" is the strongly anti-liberationist and anti-nationalist political climate since the mid-1970s, of which the field is a product (22).

While these metanarratives advanced by Shringarpure and Lazarus have a certain utility in making sense of broader trends in the field and in comparing the differences between academic and mainstream reception of these works, they do not account for every trend we find in the data relating to these specific novels. Indeed, they do not account for the marked difference between *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* in scholarly attention; however, despite these novels' similar "metropolitan narratives" of displacement and hybrid identity, Adichie's career trajectory and extra-literary fame by the publication of her third novel give her an evident advantage over first-time novelist Bulawayo. Similarly, these metanarratives of postcolonial studies' bias do not account for some marked trends in the syllabi.

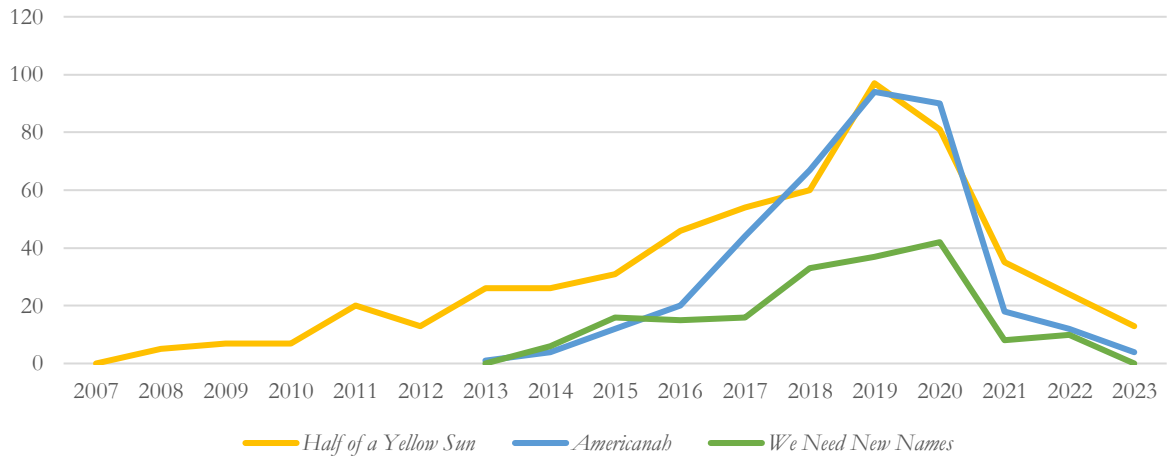
*Syllabus*

In Saint and Shringarpure's survey, the three novels are amongst the most assigned singular texts in the field of African literature. While the survey finds that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are the top two novels assigned in university syllabi, *We Need New Names* is in third place and *Americanah* is in fourth place (see fig. 1). These novels, particularly the first three, emerge as clear leaders of the pack. *Half of a Yellow Sun* finds itself in twelfth place; still a strong showing, assigned by around fifteen percent of all respondents, but not as dramatically overrepresented in the surveyed syllabi as *We Need New Names* and *Americanah*. Among authors (fig. 2), Adichie is the joint-second most taught writer with Achebe, after Ngũgĩ, while Bulawayo is in seventh place—no mean feat given that she had only published one novel by the time this survey was completed.

### *Half of a Yellow Sun*

What we find on *Open Syllabus*, on the other hand, is that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is assigned most frequently of the three novels, with 681 syllabus appearances. This contradicts Saint and Shringarpure's findings, in which *Americanah* and particularly *We Need New Names* have a much higher rate of syllabus appearances. Regarding the yearly appearance rate (see fig. 8), *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s main advantage, at least over *Americanah*, is its earlier publication date, which has allowed it to amass syllabus appearances over a more extended period of time.

**Fig. 8** Novels by yearly syllabus appearance

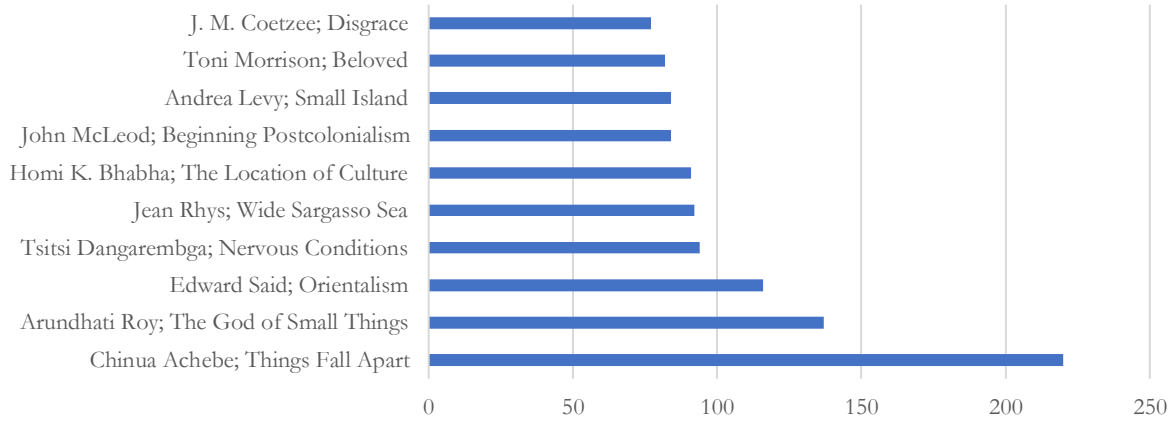



Source: *Open Syllabus*.

To understand why this advantage is not reflected in Saint and Shringarpure's survey, we need to examine the syllabi on which *Half of a Yellow Sun* are assigned more closely, particularly regarding the other works assigned alongside the novel. This analysis provides a good comparison to the 'canons' that emerge in both the *MLA* publications and the corpus of reviews in Chapter 1.

In the corpus of syllabi on *Open Syllabus* containing *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we find a canon of African literary works not dissimilar to those found in the literary reviews (not to mention Saint and Shringarpure's survey), with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in first place, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in fourth place and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* in tenth place (see fig. 9).

**Fig. 9** *Half of a Yellow Sun* most frequently assigned with




Source: *Open Syllabus.*

What is striking is the prevalence of postcolonial theory assigned with the novel, with Said's foundational *Orientalism* in third place and various other key texts rounding out the top ten. The fact that *Half of a Yellow Sun* appears to be assigned frequently in a 'postcolonial,' rather than a specifically 'African' literary context, could account for the fact that Saint and Shringarpure's data—which is restricted to academics in the field of African literature—does not register its canonicity in the same way.

Another significant factor which *Open Syllabus* allows us to investigate is the course itself in terms of the topic, the discipline, the focus and the level. The hypothesis that *Half of a Yellow*

*Sun* is assigned relatively more often as a 'postcolonial' text is supported by the titles of the syllabi containing *Half of a Yellow Sun*, forty-nine of which contain the term 'postcolonial–.' Another explanatory factor is that many of the syllabi on which *Half of a Yellow Sun* appears are not in the discipline of literature; indeed, the novel is assigned in seventy-three political science courses and seventy history courses. This rate of non-literature syllabus appearances is far higher than for *Americanah* or *We Need New Names* and again, would likely not appear in Saint and Shringarpure's survey. In both these instances, it is *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s content that determines these differences. While, as Shringarpure herself would argue, the novel's thematisation of postcolonial conflict may make it less amenable to the discipline of English literature, this content makes it suitable pedagogically beyond literature's disciplinary borders. Additionally, and in contradiction to Shringarpure's argument, it would also seem that the novel's political and historical thematisation of the postcolonial, as well as its generic 'postcoloniality,' are what make it suitable for a course explicitly on 'postcolonialism' *within* the discipline of English literature.

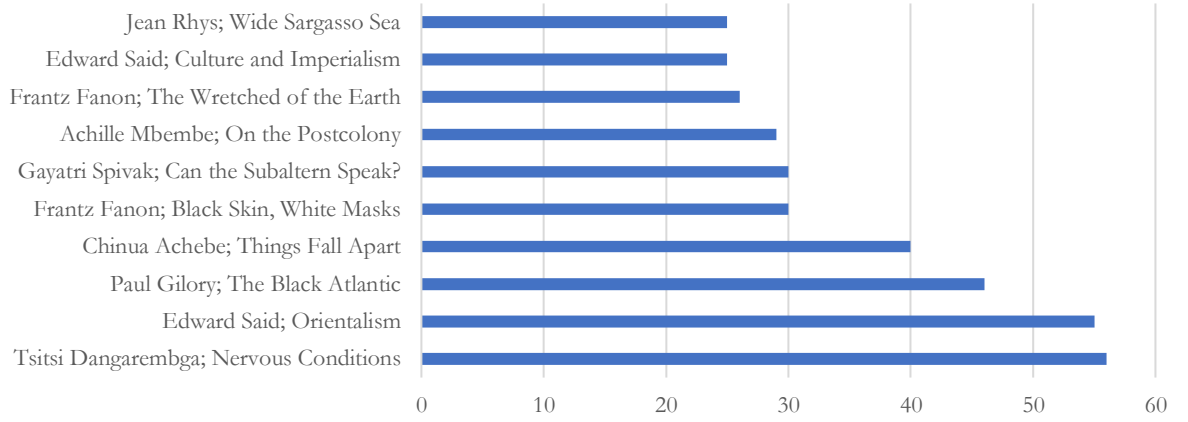
### *We Need New Names*

*We Need New Names* has the fewest mentions by far of all three novels, at 241. This correlates with both the *MLA* data and the reviews, in which *We Need New Names* was the least discussed of all three novels. The strong correlation among reviews, academic publications and syllabi underlines the interconnectedness of all these institutional mechanisms in the process of consecration. Where this correlation is less apparent is, as we have seen, in literary awards, which favour *We Need New Names* over *Americanah*, and in Saint and Shringarpure's survey, in which *We Need New Names* is the most frequently assigned of the three novels under analysis and the third-most frequently assigned overall.

One possible explanation for these seemingly contradictory findings is that *We Need New Names* is in this sense the inverse of *Half of a Yellow Sun*; that is, assigned overwhelmingly in an 'African literature' context. While the novel is also frequently assigned with a long list of core postcolonial theory texts (see fig. 10), a much higher percentage of the syllabi featuring *We Need*

*New Names* explicitly mention 'Africa–' in their titles, at twenty-four, or ten percent, versus only one syllabus entitled 'postcolonial–.'

**Fig. 10** *We Need New Names* most frequently assigned with




Source: *Open Syllabus.*

At the same time, almost every syllabus is within the discipline of English literature. The *Open Syllabus* data for *We Need New Names* would thus correspond much more closely to Saint and Shringarpure's survey, which is limited to academics working in the field of African literature, than the *Open Syllabus* data for *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Another notable text we find assigned relatively frequently with *We Need New Names* is Wainaina's "How to Write about Africa," with thirteen occurrences. Although less of an issue in the academic sector of the field than in the press, the presence of Wainaina's emblematic article on thirteen separate syllabi gestures to the continued relevance of this discourse to pedagogical concerns. In scholarly writing, on the other hand, this concern is less visible. An analysis of the interpretive terms the *MLA* articles are tagged with finds a low rate of occurrence for the term 'stereotype,' with two incidences per novel, particularly in contrast to the high rate at which the idea of stereotyping is referenced in the reviews.[6] This difference in emphasis on 'stereotypes'

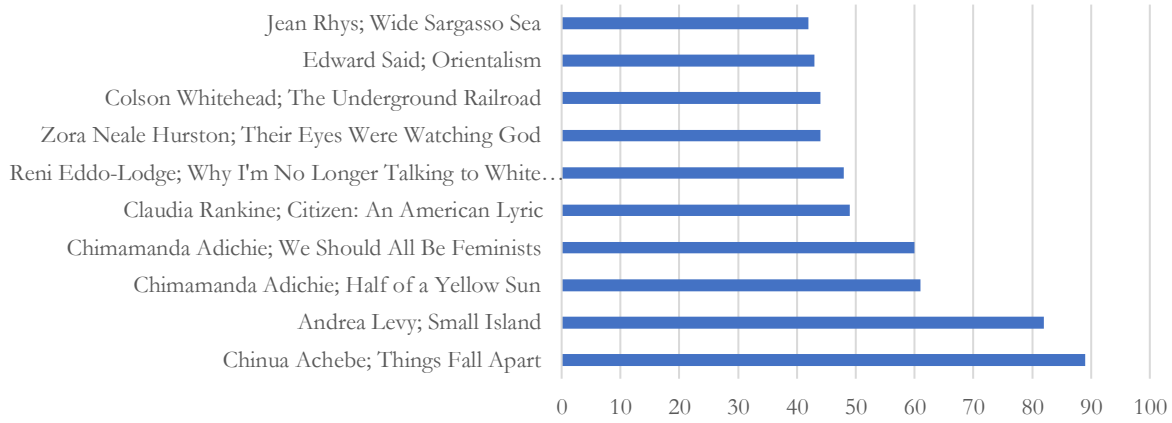
[6] The results derived from these key analytic terms are not particularly conclusive, however, since unlike my analysis of the reviews, the current analysis does not include a close reading of every scholarly publication on each of the three novels. Without reading every paper, any conclusions drawn from the data may say more about the tagging methodology than the ways in which these novels are actually being discussed in the academic sphere.

between these institutional mechanisms gestures towards the difference in intended audience and goals between the three institutional mechanisms.

### *Americanah*

Finally, we turn to *Americanah*, which has a total of 546 syllabus appearances, with a steady rise since its publication in 2013 and a very similar peak to *Half of a Yellow Sun* in 2019 (fig. 8). We see a similar peak for *Americanah* in the *MLA* publications (fig. 7), suggesting a degree of correlation between the two academic mechanisms of consecration. In terms of texts that are frequently assigned alongside *Americanah* (see fig. 11), *Things Fall Apart* is once again in first place.

**Fig. 11** *Americanah* most frequently assigned with




Source: *Open Syllabus.*

Postcolonial theory is much less significant here, with fewer prominent key postcolonial texts. This echoes the findings in the *MLA* tags by key terms, in which 'postcolonial–' is much less represented as an analytic lens than with the other novels, with only nineteen percent of the publications tagged with this term. What we do find in much greater numbers are works by African American writers. Emerging here is a similar trend to what we saw in the reviews, in which, with the publication of *Americanah*, Adichie is situated in a wider canon of American writers, (here specifically African American writers) especially in comparison to *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This trend in Adichie's position in the literary field I examine in greater detail below in my analysis of the 'canons' produced in scholarship.

**II. Adichie's trajectory and literary clusters**

To examine the how these novels are situated in the canon by scholars, I count the other works and authors with which the publications under analysis are tagged on the *MLA* database—in other words, the works and authors with which these three novels are written about in published research. I pay specific attention to the national origin of the authors concerned, in order to ascertain how nationality and the three novels' African provenance plays a role in their canonisation.

***Half of a Yellow Sun***

Regarding *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the tags show a similar focus as the reviews on Nigerian authors (see fig. 12).

**Fig. 12** *Half of a Yellow Sun*
tagged titles by author's region of origin


Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography.*

Of the eighty-eight tagged Nigerian works, only thirty-nine are unique titles. The discrepancy between overall occurrences and unique titles shows that the corpus of Nigerian works these scholars draw from is restricted; in comparison to the reviewers' references, we find only a slightly broader pool of Nigerian writers. In the reviews, forty-one percent of references to Nigerian writers are unique incidences, while in the *MLA* publications, this figure rises only slightly to forty-four percent. While I had presumed—due to the lesser need for mainstream recognition of works in scholarly writing and an academic focus on originality—there would be a

much more extensive list of Nigerian authors read here, what we find is that there is still a focus on a few key canonical figures.

As seen in the reviews, Achebe still dominates this list, with tags in eighteen publications overall in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, seven of these being references to *Things Fall Apart*. Overall, twenty-three percent of incidences of Nigerian writers turn out to be Achebe. This strikingly, is the same rate of occurrence as in the reviews. In another parallel to the reviewers' canon, Chris Abani is in second place, with ten mentions overall. Helon Habila is, in contrast, less dominant here, while another contemporary Nigerian author, Uzodinma Iweala, rises to the fore with seven mentions. These contemporary Nigerian authors not only make multiple appearances in the canons produced by the different agents in the field; they also fulfil multiple roles as agents themselves. Habila and Iweala are both prolific reviewers whose influential reviews of *We Need New Names* I discuss in Chapter 1.

Overall, the scholarship situates *Half of a Yellow Sun* in a distinctly Nigerian canon of works. Through the mixture of classic and contemporary Nigerian works we see referenced in relation to the novel, the scholars create a genealogy for *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Despite this overwhelming focus on the Nigerian literary field, scholars still write about the novel in relation to a relatively restricted number of authors and works.

### *Americanah*

Regarding *Americanah*, novels by all African authors make up just over three-quarters of total works mentioned (fig 13).

**Fig. 13** *Americanah*
tagged titles by author's region of origin


Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography.*

In comparison to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, however, the ratios are reversed, with books by non-Nigerian African authors far outweighing books by Nigerian authors. Just like in the reviews then, we find less of an emphasis on solely Nigerian authors when it comes to *Americanah*—although, compared to the reviews these are still very present. In another parallel to the reviews, writers from the USA have a stronger showing here than in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, although this trend is less emphasised than in the reviews. Mainly, however, scholars write about *Americanah* in relation to a broader African canon.

### *We Need New Names*

This trend is amplified in the *MLA* data for *We Need New Names*, in which, similarly to the reviews, an overwhelming ninety-seven percent of the works concatenated with Bulawayo's novel are by African authors (fig. 14).

**Fig. 14** *We Need New Names*
tagged titles by author's region of origin

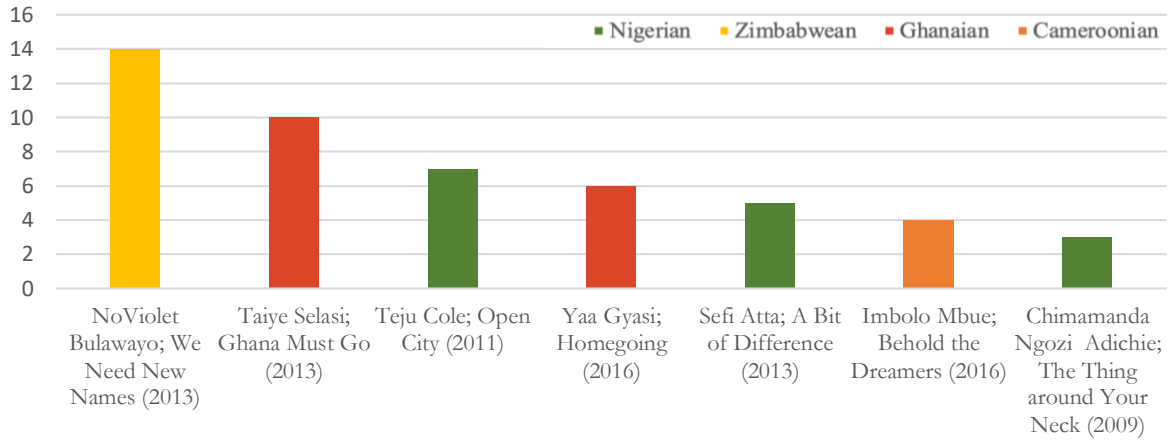

Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography.*

Of the total works, forty-two percent are by Nigerian writers, higher than the percentage of Nigerian works in the tags for *Americanah*. This overrepresentation of Nigerian writers can, in part, be explained by the fact that thirty-nine percent of these incidences relate to *Americanah*, highlighting the strong concatenation between these two works. Other Nigerian works also occur frequently, however, which primarily underscores the dominance of Nigerian writing in the Anglophone African literary field, and the corresponding scholarly attention paid to it. This also emphasises the fact that *Americanah* is not positioned in a particularly Nigerian context *at all* by literary scholars.

Despite African works being somewhat less dominant in relation to Adichie's novels, there is still a preponderance of works by other African authors discussed in relation to all three novels, particularly compared to what we see in the reviews. These findings indicate a much stronger conception of an 'African literary field' and an 'African canon' within scholarly writing than within the mainstream press. Here the different goals and intended audiences of these two forms of publication become apparent: academic writing, which is focused on expertise and original research, must necessarily involve a stronger grasp of this specific literary field.

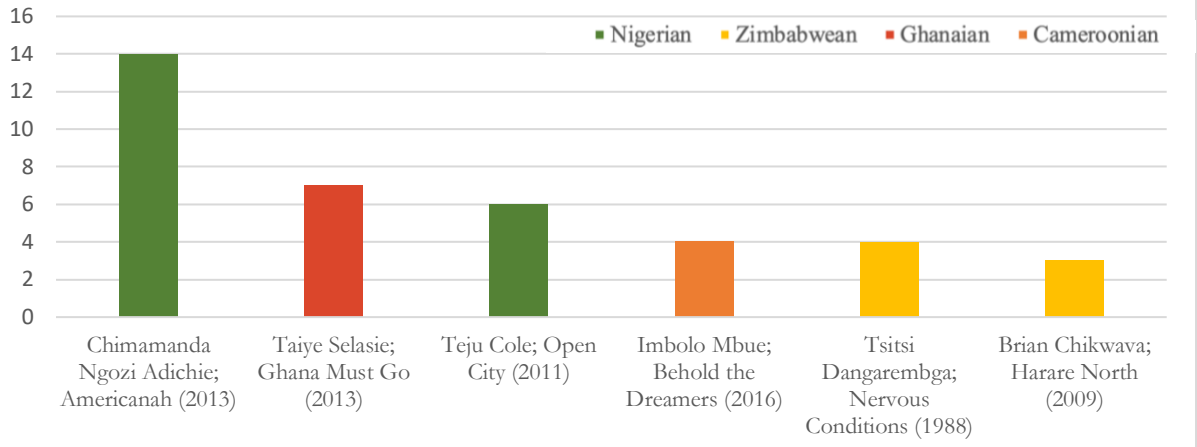
Concerning *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, there are strong similarities not only in the dominance of works by African authors but in the specific works themselves (fig. 15 & 16).

**Fig. 15** Most concatenated titles with *Americanah*




Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*.

**Fig. 16** Most concatenated titles with *We Need New Names*




Source: *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*.

Notably, these texts are most often discussed in scholarly work with each other, with fourteen publications analysing them together. This can be (at least partially) explained by accounting for the very same reasons I chose to examine these texts together, aside from their shared canonicity: *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* have the same year of publication (2013), and a similar plot (a young woman protagonist emigrates from an African country to the United States). In second place for both novels is the Ghanaian author Taiye Selasi, and her novel *Ghana Must Go*, also published in 2013 and dealing with African emigration to the United States. In third place for both is Teju Cole's 2011 novel *Open City*, which follows a diasporic Nigerian man in New York City—but unlike the other novels, does not feature any African settings. Notably, *Open City* is also a common reference point for the reviewers when it comes to *Americanah*. The remainder of the most mentioned texts are all by African authors, with more Nigerian authors in relation to *Americanah* and more Zimbabwean authors in relation to *We Need New Names*. Viewing the most referenced works in the literary criticism of these two novels side-by-side, we get the sense of an emergent constellation of African novels published in the early 2010s, with Adichie and Bulawayo at its centre.

In the canons of both the reviewers and the scholars, we see a development in Adichie's literary career, in which she moves from being classified broadly as a Nigerian author, grouped

both among Nigerian contemporaries such as Abani and Habila and Nigerian classics such as Achebe and Soyinka, to being situated in a broader canon of writers, whether this be African more generally, American or indeed, global. Between the publication of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, we see Adichie's standing in the literary field change as she becomes more prominent. So makes a similar finding regarding ethnic minority authors in the United States, showing that while these authors are generally grouped together by reviewers, "the authors [that these reviewers] seem most interested in writing about … are paradoxically held apart from that grouping" (98). So sees this phenomenon as part of a larger trend in the US reception of minoritised writers, which he terms the "Toni Morrison effect," after the canonical twentieth-century writer who is a paradigmatic example of this trajectory. Adichie's trajectory between *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* underlines her Morrison-like presence in the Anglophone press and academic sphere. Her increasing prestige correlates with an increasing deterritorialisation, especially in relation to the specifically Nigerian contextualisation of her work in the early stages of her career.

Another significant difference in scholarly work on *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* is the dominance of references to Achebe in the former and the dearth of references to the twentieth-century Nigerian author in the latter. While Achebe is tagged eighteen times in *MLA* publications on *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* is read only once in relation to an Achebe novel. This is at least in part determined by the novels' content: while as historical fiction, *Half of a Yellow Sun* deals with the same subject matter as some of Achebe's work, *Americanah* positions itself as a firmly contemporary novel. However, the fact that Achebe is dropped almost entirely as a reference point is remarkable, especially given the fact that like *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is also written about in relation to Achebe's work eighteen times in *MLA* publications.

One explanation for this dramatic change may be Adichie's own distancing of her writerly persona from Achebe. Daria Tunca traces how the strong connection forged between

Adichie and Achebe by journalists and literary critics began to be rejected by Adichie after the publication of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. At the beginning of her career, Adichie was commonly positioned as Achebe's literary offspring, based not only on "their common Nigerian nationality and Igbo ethnicity," but also on a long list of homages, including Adichie calling Achebe "the writer whose work is most important to me" and Achebe "writing a laudatory blurb for … *Half of a Yellow Sun* … in which he called his younger colleague 'a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers'" (Tunca 109). By the end of the decade, however, Adichie began to reject the comparisons with Achebe. In 2011, she stated in interview: "Being a sub-Saharan African writer, you're supposed to be like Chinua Achebe, who is called the father of modern African literature. But you're probably compared to him because people don't know any other writers from Africa" (qtd. in Tunca 114). Tunca argues that such statements constitute an attempt by Adichie "to cultivate her literary genealogy on her own terms, without having its parameters dictated by uninformed Westerners who, as stated in the passage cited above, 'don't know any other writers from Africa'" (114). Notably, Adichie's position-taking does not only take place paratextually, but also on the textual level. While, as I have mentioned, *Americanah*'s contemporary and international setting represents a generic departure from Achebe, Chapter Three explores in more detail how even the novel's narrative implicitly carves out a space in the literary field for Adichie beyond Achebe's legacy.

Aside from Adichie's explicit position-taking, another reason for this change is the development of her status as a literary star—in other words, her consecration. As Huggan, drawing on Bourdieu, notes, "consecration is the culmination of a sometimes lengthy legitimising process that effectively entitles the consecrated writer to confer a similarly privileged status on others" (213). While in the early stages of Adichie's career, Achebe functioned as "the consecrated writer" with "the power to consecrate and to win assent when he … consecrates an author or work—with a preface, a favourable review, a prize" (Bourdieu, qtd. in Huggan 213-14), Adichie's growing prestige in the latter part of her career has made the symbolic capital connoted

by Achebe's name less needed. Indeed, in this period in which Adichie has become somewhat of a household name in the Anglosphere, she has moved into a different frame of reference entirely. Tunca notes that after Adichie's wildly popular TEDx talk "We Should All Be Feminists" was sampled in a song by Beyoncé, the lecture itself became commonly "viewed through the lens of its incorporation into the work of [the] popular American singer" (116).

The movement away from Adichebean criticism around 2010 has a similar dynamic to Adichie's movement away from the broader Nigerian literary context in this period: as she becomes more of a household name in the Anglosphere due to both her literary and extra-literary fame, Adichie begins to function as her own value-creating mechanism in the literary field and even gains cultural capital beyond it in her association with one of America's most popular celebrities. Seen in this light, the regular associations between *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* perform a similar consecrating function for Bulawayo as the associations between *Things Fall Apart* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* did for Adichie. Although she has not yet become more of a canonical figure than him, it would not be an overstatement to say that Adichie has become her generation's Achebe, at least as an agent of legitimation.

**III. Conclusion**

Overall, we find a general pattern emerging in the data from the *MLA* publications and surveys of the syllabi. The exception here is the glaring difference in the positions of *We Need New Names* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* in Saint and Shringarpure's survey compared to my own survey of *Open Syllabus*, which I have argued is mainly due to differences in scope. In both the mainstream and academic publications, *Americanah* receives the most critical attention of the three novels. In syllabus appearances it is consistently (unlike the other two novels) in close second place, and Adichie remains one of the highest ranked authors in Saint and Shringarpure's survey. *Americanah*'s consistent high ranking evinces a relatively distinct correlation between the different institutional agents of legitimation, and reinforces So and Manshel et al.'s argument that

English professors are not as distant from the vicissitudes of literary fashion, determined in part by reviews and prizes, as some may like to think.

Another pattern we see emerging in all of the datasets is a list of overlapping and relatively stable reference points in the canons that both 'mainstream' and academic institutions set up. By now familiar names on this list include Chinua Achebe, Chris Abani, Uzodinma Iweala and Tsitsi Dangarembga. However, there is a key difference between the academic and 'mainstream' agents of consecration here. While still privileging these star writers, the academic arm has a stronger conception of these authors as comprising a distinctive field than the reviewers, who have less of a focus on a pan-African literary world.

A second cluster of novels emerges around *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* specifically. These are the generically similar African works that occur frequently alongside them, including Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, and Teju Cole's *Open City*. These clusters we can conceptualise in terms of what Mads Rosendhal Thomsen calls "constellations," which he sees as geographically and temporally defined canons within the global literary market. Thomsen argues that "the international canons consist of several constellations of works that share properties of formal and thematic character, where canonized works can bring attention to less canonized, but affiliated, works, and draw them into the scene of world literature" (3). While these constellations temporarily bloom in various sub-centres, often focused on singular authors (we might justifiably classify Adichie as the centre of this one), "the continuity is located in the dominant centres of distribution and valuation" (Thomsen 2). It is this centralisation of the global literary field that brings us to Adichie and her evolving position on the world stage.

Expanding Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field beyond the borders of the nation state, Casanova's influential formulation of a "world literary space" is a useful theoretical model to conceptualise the changing position of these authors in the international field of literary reception. According to Casanova, "[t]he primary characteristics of this world literary space are hierarchy and inequality," with the "skewed distribution of goods and values" being one of this

world-structure's "constituting principles, since resources have historically accumulated within national frontiers" (200). Casanova characterises writers who are "structurally very distant" from the centre of literary prestige, which she terms the "Greenwich Meridian of literature" (196) and sees centring around Europe, in a constant struggle to move closer to this central position.

While the analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s consecration finds great emphasis on situating the novel within a specifically Nigerian literary history, this emphasis changes dramatically in relation to *Americanah*. A trend in all the major three datasets (the literary reviews, the academic publications and the syllabi) is Adichie's move, following Casanova's model, to a more central position in the world literary structure. Although this is expressed somewhat differently in each institutional mechanism, with the reviews associating *Americanah*-era Adichie with US and UK canons, the academic publications associating Adichie with a more generally African canon over a Nigerian one—not to mention a noticeable rise in references to American literature—and the syllabi situating Adichie in an African American canon, there is an undeniable movement from a more restricted and specific, mainly Nigerian literary field with *Half of a Yellow Sun* to a more international and US-focused canon with *Americanah*. While in my analysis of this trend in the reviews I use English's concept of the "deterritorialization of prestige" (282) to explain this movement, in Adichie's academic reception we see not only a move away from a Nigerian literary context but also a move closer to the centre of Anglophone literary prestige—mainly the United States—which makes Casanova's model more appropriate.

As I have mentioned, there may be some reasons for this at plot-level, with *Americanah* representing what Eileen Julien terms an "extroverted African novel" in its international setting and thematisation of globalisation, migration and other global literary concerns (685). The fact, however, that *We Need New Names* thematises the same concerns and arguably highlights the United States even more in its setting (its protagonist, Darling, does not return to Zimbabwe, unlike Ifemelu in *Americanah,* who ends up in Nigeria), makes it a suitable control variable. The

reviews, syllabi and particularly the academic publications firmly situate Bulawayo in an African literary context with little emphasis on any African American or other American canon.

These comparisons to the other novels' 'canons' show that Adichie's position in the literary field changed dramatically between the publication of her second and third novel. Clearly, Adichie does begin to occupy a Toni Morrison-like position in the Anglophone literary field over this period. The more success she garners, the less she is associated with her specific grouping, and the more, in Casanova's formulation, she moves to the centre of the world literary space. This central position in the Anglophone field is not necessarily, as Casanova writes, centred on Europe. Indeed, Adichie's globalisation coincides with her joining the ranks of America's literary celebrities. Adichie's success, however laudable, does not necessarily connote a change in the structure of the entire field. As Casanova argues, "the effects of consecration by the central authorities can be so powerful" as to give "the illusion that the structure of domination has simply disappeared" (204). This is of course not the case. Indeed, Adichie's unique trajectory that separates her, in turn, from other Nigerian, African, and 'postcolonial' writers constitutes the exception that proves the rule: despite the explosive popularity of select postcolonial authors in the Anglosphere, literary resources remain unequally distributed across the world literary space. And indeed, it is often the case that the authors themselves are the most aware of this. As Casanova writes, the global literary field "functions invisibly for the most part, save to those most distant from its great centres or most deprived of its resources, who can see more clearly than others the forms of violence and domination that operate within it" (194). It is this heightened awareness of the structural inequality of the global literary field for those who operate within it that I explore in the next two chapters. My close-reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* brings to the fore how Adichie and Bulawayo use their novels to register their position in the world literary structure, and in this, function as responses to the discourses with which the conveyers of cultural capital—reviewers, literary prizes and academics—interpellate these texts.

## 3. The Literary Field in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*

Having examined how literary institutions generate discursive contexts for these novels in the literary field, I focus in the next two chapters on the texts themselves, reckoning with how they understand their own place in the field and how they respond to the authors' institutional success. This chapter reads Adichie's novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* side-by-side to outline how these novels reflect on the literary field and the place of the African author within it. As we have seen in Chapters One and Two, contextualising a work with reference to other works, authors and literary movements is an integral part of the legitimising process. This chapter shows how Adichie situates her writing in her own canon by curating a literary genealogy for herself, thus wresting back legitimating power from the agents in the field. At the same time, I ask how Adichie's works register her trajectory within the world literary field and the uneven distribution of cultural resources that constitute this space.

### I. Metafiction

Adichie's second and third novels, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, invite a comparative metafictional reading through their shared self-reflexive elements, most significantly the fact that both novels have protagonists who are writers, along with the fact that they share a 'text-within-a-text' structure, in which snippets of the author-protagonists' work are embedded in the novel. These short segments allow for a reading of the frame text as an explanatory and contextualising envelope to the embedded text. Indeed, as Ruth S. Wenske points out, the "writing-within-writing" in *Half of Yellow Sun* renders the rest of the narrative "writing-about-writing," which reflects on the stakes of literary production itself (126). With this layering of text, Adichie builds metafiction into the structure of her novels.

Adichie's first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, by contrast, lacks the overt metafictional elements of these later works. Despite this, I will reference it in passing for two reasons: the narrative centrality, as in all her novels, of Nsukka University, and the fact that the events *of Purple Hibiscus* take place chronologically between the two other novels, and so fulfil an important role by

plugging the gap between the 1960s writer-characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the 1990s and 2000s writer-character in *Americanah*.[7] Thus, *Purple Hibiscus*, despite its lack of author-protagonist and embedded text, still plays a minor role in Adichie's genealogy.

Despite their similarities in structure, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* approach their metafictional reflection on the writer's career very differently. Whereas *Americanah* follows its writer-protagonist, Ifemelu, from her teens onward, through her education to the highs and lows of her career, the central conceit of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is that the identity of the writer is not clear until the end of the novel. Indeed, the novel misleads the reader by making it seem like Richard, the white English novelist, is the writer of the embedded text. In the end, the writer is revealed to be Ugwu, the Igbo houseboy with rural beginnings. In this depiction of Richard and Ugwu—along with the novel's third writer-character Okeoma—at different stages in their career and each facing their own struggles for cultural legitimacy, Adichie maps out the literary field of early postcolonial Nigeria. *Americanah*, which documents the life of its writer-protagonist from the 1990s to the late 2000s, is a continuation of this genealogical project.

**II. Literary genealogy**

Wendy Griswold, in her study of the Nigerian literary field, writes that "Nigeria has been an independent state only since 1960, and the Nigerian novel is not much older" (12), with Amos Tutuola's 1952 *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* conventionally seen as the first Nigerian novel in English.[8] Almost all existent Nigerian novels have been published since independence, thus creating a relatively unified Anglophone literary tradition in which "the 'Nigerian novel' has developed in conjunction with the country itself" (Griswold 12). Adichie's three novels, spanning

[7] In interview, Adichie has stated the Nigeria represented in *Purple Hibiscus* is a composite of the Babangida regime of the late 1980s and the Abacha dictatorship of the 90s (McGrath). This gives us an approximate timespan between 1985-1998.

[8] This is of course not the first major literary work published in Nigeria. There were also novels published in other languages before this, such as D.O. Fagunwa's Yoruba novel *Ògbójú Odẹ́ nínú Igbó Irúnmolẹ̀* (*The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*).

between the early 1960s and the 2000s, therefore provide not only a history of Nigeria, but also a history of the Anglophone Nigerian novel in close to its entirety.

In her novels' reflection on the history of the Nigerian writer, Adichie traces her own genealogy as a writer back to the first post-independence group of Nigerian writers. Although Tutuola is commonly seen as the first Anglophone novelist in Nigeria, Griswold argues from her vantage point in 2000 that the best-known writers are "Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, Booker Prize winner Ben Okri, and the universally acclaimed Chinua Achebe" (36). The symbolic significance of Achebe in the field in particular is hard to overstate, leading Simon Gikandi to proclaim that "Achebe was the person who invented African literature" (5). As we have seen, the agents of legitimation overwhelmingly compare Adichie with Achebe, especially in the reception of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Despite distancing herself from Achebe in the latter part of her novelistic career, Adichie's early work is replete with references to the so-called 'father of African literature,' and thus seems to welcome these comparisons, even forging them herself.

Her debut on the literary scene, *Purple Hibiscus,* begins with the line: "*Things* started to *fall apart* at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (3, my emphasis). In this allusion, very obvious to readers of African literature, Adichie leverages herself into the position of Achebe's spiritual successor. In light of this, *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s epigraph—which is taken from Achebe's poem "Mango Seedling"—gestures to a literary history in which Achebe represents the beginning and Adichie represents, at least at the time of her writing, the endpoint. The poem Adichie uses as *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s epigraph is doubly significant as it is dedicated to the memory of Christopher Okigbo, a major Nigerian poet who died in the Biafran War and—as Adichie mentions in her author's note—on whom the character of Okeoma is based (542). These references to real writers undergird Adichie's representation of a fictional literary field and at the same time, gesture to her own position in the literary genealogy that she sets up in her

fiction. It is this fictionalisation of the literary field and the struggles for legitimacy within it that I explore in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

### III. *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The narrative of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is focalised through three major characters: Ugwu, a houseboy in the home of an academic, Odenigbo, at the University of Nsukka; Olanna, a lecturer in sociology and Odenigbo's partner; and Richard, a white English author who originally comes to Nigeria in hopes of finding material for a novel. *Half of a Yellow Sun* follows the trajectory of these characters' lives from the early 1960s post-independence period to the Biafran War in the late 1960s, broadly centred on Nsukka, the home of the University of Nigeria's first campus. While these events constitute the contents of the frame text, the narrative is punctuated by an embedded text, representing the literary work of one of its characters—ostensibly Richard, eventually revealed to be Ugwu. The embedded text, entitled "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died," narrates the history of the nation of Biafra, and thus sets the stage for the battle over literary legitimacy in the frame text—namely, who gets to tell this history.

There are three author figures in the novel, each of whom is positioned as a potential writer of this embedded text: Richard, the white English emigré; Okeoma, the brilliant and political poet; and Ugwu, the houseboy who through his education and experiences during the Biafran War, turns to writing at the end of the novel. Eventually, Ugwu is revealed to be the author of the symbolically important embedded text. By contrasting these three figures, reflecting on their success and failures as authors, Adichie historicises the role of the African writer. At the same time, Adichie intervenes in an important discourse emerging in the literary field at the time, the question of *who* gets to write about *what*. As I have shown in the first chapter, the reviewers in particular are preoccupied with this question, which accounts for their obsessive emphasis on Adichie and Bulawayo's biographical details. By staging this debate in the 1960s context, *Half of a Yellow Sun* situates this issue in the foundations of the Nigerian literary field.

*Richard as the defunct writer*

In Richard's inability to write throughout the novel—and, on a larger scale, his inability to author the narrative of Biafra—Adichie sets up a regime of value concerning who is able to represent Africa. The message here is clear: in the postcolonial period, the white author writing about Africa in the vein of Joseph Conrad is a defunct figure. Richard is introduced as an author coming to Nigeria to find inspiration for his novel. His deficiency is characterised insistently and in multiple ways. When questioned about his novel's progress, Richard is consistently evasive, refusing to state anything explicitly because "he did not know whether it was a novel or not because the pages he had written did not make any coherent whole" (140). This lack of coherency reflects the senselessness of an English writer searching for inspiration and material in postcolonial Nigeria.

Richard's inability to fulfil the role of author is reflected in his impotence with Kainene, his partner. Richard's virility is intertwined with his writing: while he struggles to write, he is also unable to consummate his relationship. When he finally manages to overcome his impotence and his writer's block, Kainene burns his manuscript after he sleeps with Olanna, her sister. What reads on the surface as a failure of masculinity also reflects the failure of a white author to represent Nigeria in the post-independence era. Read as an intertext with *Things Fall Apart,* Richard's failures signal that the days of the District Commissioner and his totalising text *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* have come to an end.

The novel aligns Richard with aesthetic and political sensibilities which it shows no longer to be viable. His fetishistic obsession with the Igbo-Ukwu roped pot, from which he attempts to draw inspiration for his own work, recalls early twentieth-century European artists' appropriation and decontextualisation of African motifs in their work. His attempts at writing fiction about Biafra are equally appropriative. When Ugwu tells him of his experience as a forced conscript during the war, Richard notes this down and states: "I shall use this anecdote in my book" (495). The novel casts Richard's use of Ugwu's experience as an anecdote in his book as

appropriation, and indicates the profound inappropriateness of Richard attempting to give voice to the Biafran people. Only in the final pages of the novel, after Ugwu asks him whether he is still writing his book, does Richard come to the realisation, that "[t]he war isn't my story to tell, really" (530). Ugwu makes the closing statement on the defunct status of the English writer in the postcolonial era: "Ugwu nodded. He had never thought it was" (531).

*Okeoma as the first-generation writer*

Although Ugwu is eventually revealed to be the writer of the embedded text, the novel strongly contrasts Richard with the Nigerian poet Okeoma. As opposed to Richard, Okeoma strikes a virile, political and impressive figure—however, he, too, is made redundant as an author figure, and is not the man to write the story of Biafra. The inspiration for Okeoma, Christopher Okigbo, was a major literary figure of the 1950s and 60s. Okeoma's eventual death and the loss of his work during the war references Okigbo's biography; however, from a more allegorical perspective, it also stages the demise of Okeoma's style and aesthetics in the Nigerian literary field.

Okeoma's "dramatic poetry" (64) enjoys prestige and legitimacy in intellectual circles prior to the war: he is introduced in the novel by Odenigbo as "the voice of our generation!" (23). The use of "generation" here is significant as it links Okeoma's writing with the "generational model" of Nigerian fiction, a historicising technique that categorises texts "according to generations, each of which is presumed to share formal and political qualities and represent a distinct stage in national literary development" (Dalley 15). In terms of chronology, but also in terms of literary style, Okeoma's work is aligned with the first generation of Nigerian writers, writing between the late 50s and the late 60s, emblematised by the canonical figures Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, as well as Christopher Okigbo himself.

Okeoma's poetry has clear intertexts with the broader first-generation literary canon. One of his poems, "about Africans getting buttocks rashes from defecating in imported metal buckets" (115), recalls the classic postcolonial motif of defecation, identified by Joshua D. Esty

as a trope in 1960s Nigerian works such as Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965) and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964). Excrement, Esty argues, symbolises "a wide cultural reorientation in which questions about nationalist excess began to mute the celebrations of independence" (1). As a trope it is thus invested in the nationalist political situation immediately following the independence period. In the second poem to which the reader is introduced, entitled "If the sun will refuse to rise we will make it rise" (179) (in reference to the rising "half of a yellow sun" of the Biafran flag), this critique of postcolonial Nigerian politics is transformed into Biafran nationalism. Ugwu remembers that "[t]he first time Okeoma had read it," he "had listened and felt buoyed by it" (219). Written during the declaration of independence in Biafra and the onset of the war, this poem quickly loses its potency as the war progresses: "Now, though, it made [Ugwu] teary. It made him long for the days when Okeoma recited poems about people getting buttocks rashes after defecating in imported buckets" (219). This allegorical nationalist poetry does not survive the war and its atrocities.

When Okeoma joins the Biafran army, he no longer writes, seeing the cause of fighting as much more significant in the people's struggle. When he does concede and recite a poem at Olanna's request, it takes on a different quality: "[Okeoma] sounded different. In Nsukka, he had read his poetry dramatically, as though convinced that his art mattered more than anything else. Now he had a tone of unwilling banter, but still banter" (407). Disillusioned with the potency of his erstwhile political art, he recites a poem in praise of Olanna. When he dies, his poems, which he bequeaths to Olanna, are never found. His death, and the loss of his poetry, signals the death of the viability of his aesthetic to represent the postcolonial tragedy of Biafra.

In the character's homage to Okigbo, but also his intertexts with Soyinka and Okara, Okeoma's writing is aligned with the first generation of Nigerian authors, whose work was directly engaged with the legacy of colonialism in their (re)construction of a literary tradition (Mba). If Richard's deficiency during the early 1960s is attributed to the end of colonialism, Okeoma's mid-1960s aesthetics are shown to no longer have a role in the disillusioned,

traumatised postcolonial state at the end of the Biafran War. With Okeoma's demise, Adichie signals the death of Nigerian literature's originary generation, representing some of Nigeria's most canonical figures, such as Soyinka and Achebe. Historically, the war was followed by the second generation, who "were also born into the colonial event but their formative years were mostly shaped by independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis" (Adesanmi and Dunton 14). Okeoma's disillusionment with his art form near the end of his life indicates a move into this new aesthetic regime.

Although Adichie's literary career did not directly follow the first generation of writers, her fictional history of the Nigerian field opens up a space for her style of writing. Adichie is typically categorised as a third-generation writer alongside such familiar names as Ben Okri, Helon Habila and Chris Abani. As we will see, Ugwu's political realism is much closer to Adichie's literary style than Richard or Okeoma's writing. Although she positions this first generation of writers, through her epigraph and the character of Okeoma, as her important literary forebears, she also narrates how they are supplanted by a newer style of writing nearer to her own.

*Ugwu as the legitimate writer*

In the end, it is only Ugwu's unique literary voice that can tell the tale of Biafra. Ugwu's initial attempts to write in Okeoma's voice underscore this: "He wrote a poem about people getting a buttocks rash after defecating in imported buckets, but it did not sound as lyrical as Okeoma's and he tore it up" (498). Ugwu's failed attempt at writing like Okeoma and his unsuccessful use of this early postcolonial motif indicates the deficiency of first-generation aesthetics in post-war Nigeria. These literary forms are no longer viable; only a specific kind of novelistic realism is able to tell the story of Biafra. Adesanmi and Dunton argue that the Nigerian novel was revived by the third generation, thanks to the "near instant canonization" of three novelists: Habila, Abani, and Adichie. Ugwu's writing signals a return to the novel as the pre-eminent literary form, reflecting a new aesthetic regime precipitated (in part) by Adichie herself,

in which the novel has "overtaken poetry to become the face—especially in international circuits—of third generation Nigerian writing" (Adesanmi and Dunton 11).

Ugwu's realist style comes alive when he begins translating his lived experiences of the past several years into prose: "Finally, he started to write about Aunty Arize's anonymous death in Kano and about Olanna losing the use of her legs, about Okeoma's smart-fitting army uniform and Professor Ekwenugo's bandaged hands. He wrote about the children of the refugee camp, how diligently they chased after lizards, how four boys had chased a quick lizard up a mango tree …" (498). Not only does the realist author have a stake in representing the 1960s postcolony, Adichie represents him as enflamed by this task in the postcolonial context. In his interview with Olanna about her experience of the war, she notes that "Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves." (512). The right kind of writer can tell the story of a culture and a people in a politically significant way; tellingly Ugwu entitles his novel "Narrative of the Life of a Country" (530).

The conceit of this 'text-within-a-text' that Ugwu ends up writing is that it is the same narrative the reader has just finished; in other words, "Narrative of the Life of a Country" is *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In fictionalising a genealogy of canonical writers, Adichie thus sets up a regime of value in which the political realist novel as a literary mode, represented by Ugwu's book and by extension, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is legitimised. Ugwu's combination of realism and political engagement mirrors Adichie's own comments on the role of the African writer. Regarding the question of politics, Adichie has stated in interview that: "I don't think that all writers should have political roles, but I do think that I, as a person who writes realist fiction set in Africa, almost automatically have a political role. In a place of scarce resources made scarcer by artificial means, life is always political. In writing about that life, you assume a political role" (qtd. in

Tunca 110). The novel thus not only valorises her brand of politically infused realism but also emphasises the importance of the writer in the Nigerian context.

**IV. *Americanah***

Although not directly about an author like *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* follows the career of its protagonist Ifemelu, who is a blog writer and journalist. With its trajectory roughly equivalent to Adichie's own career, Ifemelu's blog, embedded in the text like Ugwu's novel, can be read as equivalent to Adichie's own work—especially since this includes, alongside novels, widely celebrated contributions to new media in the form of her TED talks. Due to both Ifemelu's autobiographical similarities to Adichie, and the novel's structural similarities to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, reading Ifemelu as an author-character in the same vein as Ugwu (et al.) allows for an illuminating comparative approach to Adichie's oeuvre.

In *Americanah*, the overall trajectory of the plot maps out the terrain of possibility for cultural production in the late 90s and early 2000s. The first part of the novel, set in Nigeria, with Ifemelu at school and later at university, documents the decline of the university in Nigeria, and with it, a place of viable transmission of cultural and symbolic capital for cultural producers. The University of Nigeria at Nsukka plays a central role in all three of her novels, and read together, her oeuvre creates a history of the institution. The history of this institution, like the history of the state, can be read in parallel with the history of the Nigerian novel. Through Nsukka, Adichie documents the struggle of maintaining both cultural production, such as fiction writing, and intellectual production, such as literary criticism, outside of the dominant centres of the global literary field.

The early chapters of *Half of a Yellow Sun* deal with the university's founding in the immediate postcolonial period, during the heady days of anticolonial and nationalist intellectual debate and production that followed independence. The later chapters document the university's devastation and the widespread feeling of disillusionment in the wake of the Biafran War. The beginning of the novel embodies what Anne W. Gulick terms the "'romance' of higher

education" in mid-twentieth century Africa: "a fundamental optimism about the prospects of the university to serve as an engine of development in the post-independence era" (38). The protagonists of *Half of a Yellow Sun*—Ugwu, Olanna, Odenigbo—are wholeheartedly invested in this notion of the university as the central site of indigenous intellectual and cultural production. Gulick argues that the destruction of Nsukka, and the replacement at the end of the novel of Richard—but also of the established university professor Odenigbo—by Ugwu as the intellectual authority, asks Adichie's readers, along with her middle-class characters, to let go of the idealised vision of the university "in favor of a fuller, more honest, and crucially less institutionalized approach to the intellectual work of nation-building after Biafra" (45).

The reduced status of the University of Nigeria following the Biafran War remains a central motif in the 1980s setting of *Purple Hibiscus*, in which the decidedly upper-class protagonist Kambili perceives Nsukka primarily as a site of disrepair and neglect. However, as the narrative progresses, Nsukka comes to represent a utopian vision of Nigeria, in which the conservative mindset of the colonially educated ruling generation is rejected and traditions stemming from the pre-colonisation period are melded with progressive politics. This utopian vision of the university, however, is not to last, with the novel's university professor, Ifeoma, being forced to emigrate to the USA due to the increasingly precarious economic position for university employees in the country. Despite the ideals still vested in the university as a site of (utopian) Nigerian intellectual production, in *Purple Hibiscus* the university can no longer retain its intellectual productive capabilities.

Finally, *Americanah* picks up the same thread at the turn of the millennium, documenting a student's forced move to the USA to finish her education due to the volatility and partial breakdown of the Nigerian education system. In the trajectory of her novels, Adichie sketches out the vast potential of the Nigerian university as a place for cultural and intellectual production, but also the huge failure of the university to train and retain its talent in an increasingly global field of cultural production. In this, Adichie indirectly documents the

importance of the American institution in training writers from the Global South and consequently, its role in the rise of the global anglophone novel. Despite this overall cynical view of Nigeria as a site of cultural production, *Americanah* ends on a hopeful note: Ifemelu eventually returns to Nigeria to stake her own claim in the country's burgeoning cultural sector, this time independent of any institution, but bolstered by her US training.

Ifemelu's initial entry into the US university system is predicated on the decline of the Nigerian university, documented by Adichie throughout her three novels. The university's outright failure in its ability to educate its young people and sustain active intellectual production, hailed by Ifeoma's departure to the USA in *Purple Hibiscus*, comes to fruition in the early chapters of *Americanah* in detailed accounts of the university's constant state of near-collapse:

> Strikes now were common. In the newspapers, university lecturers listed their complaints, the agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose own children were schooling abroad. Campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Students hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all. Everyone was talking about leaving. Even Emenike had left for England. (98)

Nsukka is emptied of not only of students but faculty members too. Ifemelu's partner, Obinze, recalls the disappointment expressed by his mother, an English professor, at the state of research and higher education at Nsukka: "Once, during his final year at university … his mother had said, 'One day, I will look up and all the people I know will be dead or abroad.' … He had sensed, in her voice, the sadness of defeat, as though her friends who were leaving for teaching positions in Canada and America had confirmed to her a great personal failure" (232). In documenting the departure of the university's talent to the sites of cultural and intellectual production in the West, *Americanah* registers the unevenness of the field of cultural production in which it emerged.

Adichie emphasises the unequal distribution of resources in this field in her characterisation of a Nigerian-educated graduate Obinze meets at a party who is illiterate in

literary analysis. Asking the former English student about the books he enjoys, Obinze realises that "for Yemi, a book did not qualify as literature unless it had polysyllabic words and incomprehensible passages" (31). Obinze is "saddened [by the fact] that Yemi was so poorly educated and did not know that he was poorly educated" (31). The optimistic outlook of *Half of a Yellow Sun* in regard to the important role of literature in a post-independence Nigeria is shown not to have come to fruition: the country's institutions are not able to train young Nigerians to write or to read adequately. Ifemelu's emigration thus compounds a certain pessimism with which Adichie characterises the intellectual and cultural landscape of Nigeria in this period, a sharp contrast to the 1960s intellectual fervour depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Indeed, it is only in the United States that Ifemelu is depicted as finding her writerly voice, and where she begins her work as a writer on her blog.

The fact that Ifemelu must emigrate to the United States to complete her education in English literature and become a writer further emphasises the uneven distribution of resources in the global literary field. Read autobiographically, Ifemelu's US education corresponds with Adichie's own MFA in creative writing from John Hopkins. On a more allegorical level, Ifemelu's move to the United States, where she becomes a successful writer, mirrors Adichie's symbolic trajectory in the literary field between the publication of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, in which her increasing prestige correlates with her changing categorisation from a distinctly Nigerian literary voice to a more globalised, and simultaneously more American figure. At this juncture, *Americanah* seems to indicate the inevitability of this trajectory in the career of a successful Nigerian writer. This is what makes Ifemelu's return to Nigeria at the end of the novel so significant, since it functions as a rejection of the field's unipolarity.

In contrast to the pessimism that characterises the first part of the novel, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria is cast as a moment of intense optimism and a rekindling of creative energy for her personally. Nigeria has changed since she has been gone; alongside Ifemelu a cultural optimism seems to have returned to the country. This is exemplified by a scene in which Ifemelu and

Obinze listen to new Nigerian pop music together. Ifemelu notes that "there was an exuberance to the song, its rhythmic joyfulness, so free of artifice, that filled the air with lightness" (441). "It's so exciting, all the new music," she says to Obinze, who responds: "It is. Now clubs play Nigerian music" (441). This passage captures the broader optimism of Ifemelu's return. At the same time, it reflects a more general optimism regarding cultural production within Nigeria—no longer importing popular culture from abroad, as Ifemelu and Obinze's obsession with US television and literature in the earlier parts of the novel highlights—Nigeria is now a site of cultural production for a domestic audience. The novel's ending, in which Ifemelu decides to start a new blog, this time focused on life in Lagos, signals a return of writing and the writer-character to the country. The fact that not only *Americanah*, but indeed Adichie's genealogy of Nigerian cultural production, which runs through her entire novelistic oeuvre, ends in this triumphant return, is significant.

Although Ifemelu's return signals the return of cultural production to Nigeria, *Americanah* significantly does not show the return of intellectual production in the form of the university or any other institution. Indeed, Ifemelu's career, which begins in the relatively traditional literary space of the university, morphs into something very non-traditional and non-institutional in the course of the novel. This decentred modality allows for Ifemelu to return home and continue writing. In a metafictional sense, Ifemelu's blog mirrors Adichie's own successes in new media, with her two TED Talks building on her writing to catalyse her status as a consecrated public figure. We can thus see Ifemelu's return and the more general optimism around cultural production in Nigeria within the context of the rise of these new media, which allow for a non-institutional approach to cultural production. In this light, *Americanah* tells us that cultural production can return home if it takes on new forms that are less reliant on the institutional agents of legitimation who may still be centred in North America and Europe.

**V. Conclusion**

My reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* maps out the trajectory of the Nigerian writer from the 1960s to the 2000s. If we superimpose this trajectory loosely on the 'generational model' of Nigerian literary production, the novels illustrate the rise of the 'first generation' supplanting the colonial literature that preceded it. By the end of the novel, Ugwu supplants both Okeoma (who supplanted Richard) as the emblematic writer of the post-war era, which represents the changing concerns of the author figure. Ugwu is still interested in the first-generation concerns of writing the "Narrative of the Life of a Country" (530), a central motivation for Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and his later works. Indeed, this title, which explicitly borrows from Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, merges this hypercanonical African American text with *There Was a Country*, Achebe's personal non-fiction account of the Biafran War. In his amalgamation of Achebe with canonical American literature, Ugwu seems to presage the literary transnationalism more thoroughly explored in *Americanah*.

Although Ugwu ends up in the position of Adichie, as the writer of the narrative we have just read, it is challenging to find similarities to Adichie in Ugwu's character. In Olanna we might more easily find a metafictional representation of Adichie, since she aligns much more closely with the author's biography as a middle-class, well-educated woman. But of the three main characters through which the novel is focalised, Olanna is significantly the only one who is not a writer. Adichie gives the task of writing the fictionalised version of her own novel to the subaltern character, rather than her fictional doppelganger. This characterisation of the writer registers a certain anxiety about Adichie's own right to represent these events. Although Adichie's choice of Ugwu as the emblematic chronicler of the nation betrays some unease about her claim to her subject matter, his atypical background does connect him to Adichie in a sense. The end of *Half of a Yellow Sun* charts the decline of the university as the writer's proper locale. Mirroring the end of *Americanah*, this denouement seems to suggest that 'authentic' culture arises organically outside of institutions. This anticipates Ifemelu's non-traditional 'literary' career—and also, of course, Adichie's own contemporary multi-media celebrity.

In *Americanah*'s much more easily read autobiographical writer-character Ifemelu, the rise of the Adichie's own generation, the "third generation" (Mba), is narrated. From a pessimistic cultural outlook in 1990s Nigeria, *Americanah* shows how the new literary paradigm is a transnational one, and it is in the wake of this global turn that the writer returns to a revitalised Nigerian cultural scene. In the narrative trajectory of Adichie's novelistic oeuvre we can identify the same celebratory narrative of Africa that Bady sees as emerging in this period. It seems that the (ideological) price to pay for Adichie's efforts to harness her own cultural capital is playing into the narrative of 'African renaissance' Bady identifies and critiques. At the same time, Ifemelu's trajectory in *Americanah* actually defies the position that Adichie herself is placed in by the agents in the field. These agents position her more centrally and associate her more closely with the USA as she becomes more consecrated. Adichie rejects this trajectory by the end of *Americanah*, showing that non-institutional cultural production can successfully return to the Nigerian cultural context.

Adichie's metafictional history of the Nigerian writer—just like the "imaginary list" of the canon (Guillory 30)—uses exemplary figures to stand in for a literary period, style and ideology. Indeed, the trajectory Adichie traces out, with its Achebean beginning and its ending in the success of the transnational author, has the effect of leveraging open a space within this canon for her own works. In Bourdieusian terms, my reading has shown how these texts register their own "literary position-taking" (*Field of Cultural Production* 30) in the field of cultural production.

## 4. Critique and Authenticity in *We Need New Names* and *Americanah*

In this chapter, I reread Adichie's *Americanah* alongside—and in comparison to—NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The novels have notable similarities: they were published in the same year, they have similar subject matter—taking as their theme the emigration of their African protagonists to the United States—and they have, most pertinently, both joined the ranks of the most consecrated contemporary African novels. In response to this consecration, I identify a fourth similarity: both novels reflect on the success of earlier publications by utilising a self-reflexive 'text-within-a-text' structure, in which the novels' frame texts deal with the reception of the novels' embedded, inner texts. The novels use this as a basis to anticipate how they will be received in the literary field and generate an implicit response.

This form of reflexivity manifests differently in each novel. In *We Need New Names*, the first chapter was originally published in 2010 as a short story entitled "Hitting Budapest," to great acclaim, winning the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2011. Following a similar trajectory as the majority of Caine Prize-winners, Bulawayo's newfound success allowed her to publish a novel*, We Need New Names*.[9] "Hitting Budapest" was incorporated, with minor changes, as the first of the novel's eighteen chapters. I read the chapters added on to form the novel as a self-conscious reflection on the content, form and success of the earlier short story, particularly from the perspective of the protagonist in her move from Zimbabwe to the United States.

*Americanah* stages a similar response to Adichie's consecration, by narrating a Nigerian writer's response to the success of her own writing, which is present in the novel as an embedded text. While *We Need New Names* responds to the real-life reception of Bulawayo's short story, which she then changes and incorporates into the novel, in *Americanah*, Adichie stages her response by fictionalising the work of a writer whose texts she embeds in the novel. This reading treats the text-within-the-text, Ifemelu's blog, as an allegorical representation of

[9] As Bady notes on the prize: "the list of winner tells the same, uniform story of How to Become An African Writer: write some stories, win the Caine Prize, then publish a novel" ("Caine Prize").

Adichie's own work (Adichie notably has more previous work and fame to draw on by the publication of *Americanah* than does Bulawayo). Through the frame text, Adichie reflects critically on the way in which her writing is received and put to use ideologically, particularly by institutions in the United States.

My reading of these metafictional texts examines how the authors respond to the discourses surrounding their consecration, specifically regarding certain key ideological talking points common to the reception of African literature in the West. These include the stereotyped representation of Africa, the focus on authorly biography to prove an ethnic novel's 'authenticity,' and the reduction of minority authors to their social identity. By responding to these discourses of consecration, these texts 'write back' to the institutional conveyers of cultural capital to stake out their authors' position in the literary field.

**I. Critique**

*Americanah: Multiculturalism and Diversity in the Academy*

In the previous chapter, I chart the trajectory of the University of Nigeria as a site of cultural production in Adichie's oeuvre, arguing that in Ifemelu's eventual return to Nigeria as a US-trained writer outside of the institutional framework of the university, Adichie signals a new literary paradigm for Nigerian writers. In this section, I focus on Ifemelu's career as a writer in the United States, and show how she develops a critical disposition vis-à-vis the US university system that trained her, as well as other consecrating institutions. By fictionalising the reception of her work, Adichie critiques the institutional discourse surrounding the work of contemporary African authors like herself, particularly the reduction of minoritised authors to markers of their social identity.

Ifemelu's blog, entitled *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*, has a very straightforward pedagogical quality to it. Ifemelu's academic boyfriend Blaine tries to convince her to make it even more so, saying: "Remember people are not reading your blog as entertainment, they're reading you as cultural commentary.

That's a real responsibility. There are kids writing essays about your blog" (312). Through this direct connection to the academy, Adichie reflects on the responsibilities of being a canonical author, specifically a minoritised writer saddled with the burden of representing a social identity.

In contemporary discourse surrounding the canon, Guillory argues, the minoritised author becomes representative of a social identity, "conceived as the experience of a marginalized race, class or gender identity" (10).[10] The frame text further elaborates on this in its depiction of Ifemelu's status as a celebrated writer. After her writing starts to become popular, she details the institutional responses she receives: "an email from the director of multicultural life at a prep school in Connecticut … asking if she would speak to the students on diversity. Another email came from a corporation in Pennsylvania … telling her a local professor had identified her as a provocative race blogger and asking if she would lead their annual diversity workshop" (304). In this description of the discourses surrounding Ifemelu's reception, Adichie is not critiquing the reduction of Ifemelu's work to matters of 'race' as a social identity, since the blog explicitly deals with race and ethnicity as its primary subject matter. Rather, what is brought to the fore in her narration of the blog's reception is the manner in which her treatment of race becomes, in her writing's institutional reception, a matter of 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism.'

In his analysis of the insertion of 'ethnic texts' into the US literary canon, David Palumbo-Liu argues that the discourses of diversity and multiculturalism are commonly co-opted by institutions as a management technique, including at the post-war US university (6). Under this paradigm, reading ethnic literature at the academy "can be seen to set a stage for the performance of difference—race relations are made manageable and students are able to 'relate' to diverse and highly differentiated experiences by reducing difference to individual encounters via ethnic 'texts'" (Palumbo-Liu 11). Ifemelu echoes this critique in her own assessment of the invitations: "The point of diversity workshops, or multicultural talks, was not to inspire any real

[10] Although as Guillory points out, this is less the case with the category of class, which "has been systematically repressed" in liberal pluralist discourse (14).

change but to leave people feeling good about themselves. They did not want the content of her ideas; they merely wanted the gesture of her presence" (305). In this, Adichie evinces a clear, critical awareness of how her texts are discursively constructed in the institution: upon consecration, her work is erased of its "complex material specificities" (Palumbo-Liu 2). The institution disregards the content of her writing, reducing Ifemelu to the markers of her social identity, and co-opts this identity for a manageable performance of difference. In this, Adichie denounces the institutional conveyers of cultural capital and the primacy—to the exclusion of other elements—of 'identity' as a category through which literature by minoritised authors is read.

Despite this strong criticism of the institutionalisation of Ifemelu's work, Adichie's representation of the relationship between authors and the university in particular remains much more ambivalent. On the one hand, Ifemelu reflects on her fortune at being, in her own words, "admitted into a hallowed American club" (3) of academia, i.e., being canonised. Yet, Ifemelu positions herself as an outsider to academia—she participates in it, but makes it clear she does not belong. Adichie emphasises the anxiety her writer feels about the legitimacy of her work: "Readers like SapphicDerrida, who reeled off statistics and used words like 'reify' in their comments, made Ifemelu nervous, eager to be fresh and to impress, so that she began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of other people's stories for something she could use" (5). In spite of Ifemelu's reverence for academia, Adichie parodies academics and their writing—here embodied by the online commenter "SapphicDerrida" and her use of overwrought words like "reify." If "SapphicDerrida" represents the weight that academia brings to bear on authors like Ifemelu, especially the power it exerts regarding a novelist's consecration, this passage exemplifies the influence this can have on the act of writing itself. As such, this passage functions as an explicit nod to the fact that Ifemelu, and by extension Adichie, is writing with canonisation in mind.

On the other hand, the image of the vulture, which is assigned to the writer desperate for stories to impress academics, can just as easily be transferred to the literary scholar and their parasitic relationship to the creators of literature, specifically hyper-canonical authors of Global South literature, who are, as *Americanah* shows, recruited by institutions in the dematerialised and vacated name of 'diversity.' The polysemous nature of this imagery only emphasises Adichie's ambivalent relationship to her consecration within the academy: while she recognises its role in the canonisation of her works, she remains critical of the manner in which the institution receives works by minoritised writers like herself, and aware of how this influence plays out not only in the consecration of works but also in their creation.

*We Need New Names: (Auto)-critiquing Western narratives*

In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo critiques the narratives expected from African authors in the West. In the style of the postcolonial bildungsroman, the novel's episodic plot follows its protagonist Darling from ages ten to eighteen. Beginning in the ironically named Zimbabwean shantytown of 'Paradise,' Darling and her friends Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Stina and Sbho have various misadventures around Paradise and other parts of the city, most notably the rich neighbourhood of 'Budapest' in the novel's adapted first chapter. Bulawayo uses these early chapters to etch out Zimbabwe's social issues from the perspective of a disadvantaged child, touching on topics as wide-ranging as poverty, AIDS, political repression and anticolonial protest. By the start of the novel's second half, Darling has emigrated to live with her Aunt Fostalina in Detroit, and later Kalamazoo, Michigan. Here the episodes are used in a similar manner to reflect on issues in the USA, particularly those faced by immigrants, while at the same time on the events of the novel's first half, particularly of the first chapter, "Hitting Budapest."

The first chapter of *We Need New Names* was originally published in the *Boston Review* as a short story entitled "Hitting Budapest." After winning "the biggest and most prominent prize for African literature—or at least the best publicized" (Bady, "Caine Prize"), "Hitting Budapest" has gone on, as Aghogho Akpome remarked in 2020, to become "the most criticized of all Caine

Prize-winning stories" (104). The critical attention started amassing around Bulawayo after she was shortlisted for the Caine Prize. Ikhide Ikheloa, in his appraisal of the prize's 2011 shortlist, successfully predicted Bulawayo's win, implying that her story would receive the prize because she insists upon "sniffing around Africa's sewers." Unlike shortlisted author David Medalie, whose story "is not African enough" for the panel due to the fact it contains "[n]o rapists, no murderers, no poverty," "Hitting Budapest" remains "stuck in the fog of stereotypes" as authors like Bulawayo "skew[…] their written perspectives to fit what they imagine will sell to the West and the judges of the Caine Prize" (Ikheloa). Continuing in a similar vein, Amatoritsero Ede accuses Bulawayo of "self-anthropologising" in an attempt to "satisfy popular Western habits of reading Africa" (114), especially in regard to the "centrality of sensational rhetoric" to her short story (119). In their responses to the short story, both critics accuse Bulawayo's depiction of children growing up in a Zimbabwean shantytown of conforming to the 'single story' of Africa prevalent—and popular—in the West.

Although Bulawayo's self-conscious reflection on the success of her short story does not perhaps respond directly to Ikheloa and Ede's critiques, this critical discourse exemplifies many of the anxieties expressed in the later chapters of *We Need New Names*. Indeed, several scenes in the latter part of the novel can be read as an interrogation of the kind of narratives that 'the West' purportedly wants to hear about Africa. Shortly after arriving in the USA, Darling attends the wedding of a Zimbabwean emigré and his white American partner. This is Darling's first narrated encounter with white Americans, and, upon entering the venue and noting the number of white people, she remarks that "of all the Americans, it's really the white people who love Africans the most" (172). In the context of Bulawayo's consecration, this can easily be read as a satirical reflection on her own success with the 'Western-leaning' Caine Prize committee and press. The metafictional reading of this scene is compounded in Darling's later encounter with a white woman in the toilets, who, fascinated by Darling's Africanness, begins to hold forth on the continent:

> Africa is beautiful, she says, going on with her favourite word. But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? Just awful.
>
> Now she is looking at me with this wounded face….
>
> I mean, I can't even—I can't even process it. And all these poor women and children. I was watching CNN last night and there was this little girl who was just—just too cute, she says. Her eyes start to mist and she looks down. I glance at the box of Kleenex at the edge of the counter and wonder if I should pick it up and hold it out to her.
>
> It just broke my heart you know, the woman says, her voice choking. (177-8)

This 'well-meaning' white woman repeats a familiar trope, conflating all of Africa into one region mired in tragedy. In this, she invokes the 'sensational rhetoric' of mainstream representations of Africa in the Western media. This scene thus evinces a similar binary as the reviewers, situating the 'Western media' as the polar opposite of an 'authentic' representation of Africa. Ironically, the white woman's rhetoric is the very same Bulawayo herself is accused of using in "Hitting Budapest." In referencing this rhetoric, this passage comments on the perceived failure of Bulawayo's previous work to "go beyond the headlines" (Habila). While this scene thus critiques the 'single story' of Africa expected by those in the West, it at the same time implicitly critiques its own representation of Africa as conforming to these same stereotypes. In the next section, I examine how Bulawayo compounds the internal contradiction represented by this auto-critique, by questioning her own claim to representing her subject matter 'authentically.'

**II. Language, Voice and Authenticity**

> I am an African, He says. This is my fucking country too, my father was born here, I was born here, just like you! ...
>
> What exactly is an African? Godknows asks. (121)

In the third chapter of *We Need New Names*, Darling and her friends from the shantytown visit the rich neighbourhood 'Budapest' in order to steal guavas. Here they become accidental witnesses to an anti-settler riot and surreptitiously watch a group of Black protestors face off

against a white couple (the husband is quoted above). Upon hearing each group's accusations and their diverging claims to Zimbabwean land and identity, Darling's friend Godknows remarks: "What exactly is an African?" (121). This becomes one of the novel's central questions, especially after Darling leaves Zimbabwe to move to the USA, where she must renegotiate her identity as a diasporic subject. Unlike Ifemelu, Darling is not a writer. She moves to the USA so that she can have a safer, more stable childhood outside of the shantytown and be able to return to school. Despite these differences, issues around identity are central to both *We Need New Names* and *Americanah*. Whereas Ifemelu goes to the United States and discovers she is Black, Bulawayo's protagonist—upon emigration—discovers she is African. This key difference between how the two characters understand their identity in the US context underpins Adichie and Bulawayo's contrasting metafictional responses to the discourse of authenticity. For Bulawayo, like Darling's identity in the diaspora, the category of *African* when it comes to *literature* takes on a very specific valence in the West—and through her use of metafiction, Bulawayo poses the question: "What exactly is an African [writer]?"

In *Americanah*, the section of the novel set in the United States, in which Ifemelu becomes both a diasporic, transnational subject and a writer, is intensely preoccupied with the idea of authenticity, and what constitutes an 'authentic' voice for a hybrid subject in a transnational setting. Indeed, the title *Americanah*, referring to a Nigerian who has returned from the USA and sees Nigeria from a US perspective, neatly summarises the novel's guiding anxiety surrounding cultural authenticity as a transnational writer. The central question of the book from a metafictional perspective, going from the title, is how an 'Americanah' can find an authentic literary voice.

Both *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* grapple with the imperative for authenticity by narrating their diasporic protagonists' quests to find this 'authentic' voice. In this, both authors play with "vernacular anglophone realism" (Nadiminti 377) as a narrative voice and in doing so, engage with the generic parameters of the global anglophone novel. Ifemelu and Darling's

emigration and search for a literary voice has marked autobiographical resonances: both Adichie and Bulawayo moved to the USA and graduated from MFA creative writing programmes. Nadiminti highlights the significance of "finding your voice" as a pedagogical imperative for the Global South writer in these programmes (382), arguing that these writers are trained to use "vernacular anglophone realism" as a literary voice (377). This genre "relies on the refusal to translate cultural difference to Western metropolitan audiences, instead evoking the tenor of vernacular language as well as untranslated localism in English" (Nadiminti 385). In this, "global South authors subsume the vernacular as an atmospheric effect for English writing" (378). Nadiminti argues that this style of writing elides the inherent complexity of using English as a means of representing the Global South.

Indeed, in *Americanah*, Adichie uses vernacular anglophone realism to express an 'authentic' hybrid American-Nigerian voice through the author character of Ifemelu, thereby reifying the consecrating institutions' essentialised notions of 'authenticity.' By continuously valorising Ifemelu's use of this voice as authentic, Adichie's own voice is implicitly valorised, while those deemed as expressing themselves in a voice that is 'too Americanised' are condemned. Although *Americanah*'s self-conscious treatment of the author-character's voice begins after Ifemelu's move to the United States, the novel is invested in language from the beginning. In an early scene, Ifemelu ruminates on her father's use of formal British English. She remarks: "She preferred it when he spoke Igbo; it was the only time he seemed unconscious of his anxieties" (48). Implicit here is that unlike the previous colonially educated generation, Ifemelu uses English unself-consciously: her English is not laden with the same anxieties as that of her predecessors. In Ifemelu's description of her father's "formal, elevated" yet stilted and self-conscious English (48), and her own contrasting "slanginess" (374), Adichie positions herself as the inheritor of a literary tradition, but one that uses English as a global language, freed from its colonial implications. In this, *Americanah* allegorises the emergence of the global Anglophone writer as the successor of the postcolonial writer, exemplifying Nadiminti's claim that "the global

novel replaces the compromised but revolutionary concerns of postcolonial writing with market-driven, consumable fiction" (378). Ifemelu's voice in these early Nigerian chapters is represented as an unproblematic expression of her Nigerian subjectivity through the medium of English.

In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo begins the narrative in a vernacular anglophone realist style, which also seemingly deflects from issues around representing the Global South. In the changes Bulawayo makes to the short story "Hitting Budapest" in order to incorporate it into her novel, she makes the text at once more realist and more vernacular. Bulawayo changes the street names in Budapest from highly allegorical names such as "IMF [International Monetary Fund] Street" and "SADC [Southern African Development Community] Street" to "Robert Street" (12) and "Chimurenga Street" (7), respectively. By taking out these fairly obvious ironic allusions to the globalised world order, Bulawayo's text changes generically, becoming more invested in novelistic realism than the allegorically loaded short story. At the same time, Bulawayo changes "SADC" to the equally politically loaded (albeit in Shona rather than English) term "Chimurenga," which refers to both political struggle in general and to specific occasions of it in Zimbabwean history. This inserts an untranslated (and perhaps untranslatable) vernacularity into the text.

Further changes to the first chapter consolidate the vernacular English of the first person narrative voice: "soccer ball" is changed to "football" (8); the vernacular profanity "kaka" (14, 15, 16, 17) is inserted into the dialogue at several points, and at the end of the chapter, the children are now followed by "the dizzying smell of Lobels bread" (20), a specifically Zimbabwean brand. By using English peppered with vernacularisms to represent the Zimbabwean everyday—even while Darling, the narrator, is ostensibly thinking and speaking in Ndebele—Bulawayo treats English as a neutral medium with which to unreflexively represent an authentic Zimbabwe, thereby eliding the inherent complexity of this mode of representation. In its use of vernacular anglophone realism, the first chapter thus seemingly work from the assumption "that ethnicity can be unproblematically ventriloquized" (Nadiminti 386). Both

novels both begin with a use of English that unreflexively expresses their experiences at home. This unself-conscious use of English as an 'authentic' means of expression, however, is complicated when the protagonists move to the United States.

Following their move to the USA, both Darling and Ifemelu adapt their accents to sound more like their American peers. This Americanised affectation allows them to move much more frictionlessly through their new environment, avoiding the frequent misunderstandings caused by their foreign accents. In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo narrates the transformation of Darling's voice; in one instance near the beginning of her time there, Darling recounts a list of American words she keeps "under [her] tongue like talismans, ready to use: pretty good, pain in the ass, full real, awesome, totally, skinny, dude, freaking, bizarre, psyched, messed up, like, tripping, motherfucker, clearance, allowance, douche bag, you're welcome, acting up, yikes" (196). This list of words starts to make itself into Darling's narrative vocabulary, until her vernacular Zimbabwean voice of the first part is no longer recognisable by the end of the novel. Ifemelu similarly adapts her voice until she is able to 'pass' as an American. In this shift, the characters lose the vernacularity and unself-conscious ease with which they expressed themselves at the beginning of the novel.

In a striking parallel between the two novels, a pivotal moment involving a telemarketer forces each protagonist to come to terms with these changes in their self-expression. In *We Need New Names*, Darling listens as her aunt attempts to order lingerie over the phone, but is consistently misunderstood by the telemarketer due to her Zimbabwean accent. Darling observes how her aunt "roll[s] her *r*, the sound of it like something vibrating in her mouth," and promises to herself that she'll "never sound like that" (199). In this key scene, Darling rejects her own Zimbabwean accent and instead chooses to adapt to an Americanised way of speaking to avoid the quotidian humiliation her aunt faces.

Reading this shift autobiographically—as a fictionalisation of Bulawayo's own experiences—presents a striking contradiction. If Darling losing her Zimbabwean voice is

represented as compromising her authentic self, this undermines Bulawayo's own claim to representing Zimbabwe 'authentically.' As such, the changes made to vernacularise the narrative voice in the early chapters represent the opposite of an unreflexive use of English; rather, by highlighting the difference between Darling in Zimbabwe and Darling in the diaspora, Bulawayo reflects implicitly on the contradictory nature of writing about Zimbabwe in English and from the diaspora.

A similar scenario in *Americanah*, on the other hand, leads Ifemelu to rediscover her 'authentic' voice. On being told by the telemarketer that she "sound[s] totally American" (175), Ifemelu decides to return to her 'real' accent. She realises, in this moment, that her fake American accent "had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (175). The passage in which she decides to give up this foreign affectation is cast as a revelatory moment of 'finding voice':

> Ifemelu decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July... It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with "So", and the sliding response of "Oh really", but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of the lip, the curling of the tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds. (173)

In this detailed somatic description of speech, Ifemelu's accent is tied to her body as a site of undeniable authenticity and selfhood. Her rejection of the 'fake' American accent she has cultivated over her time in the United States is shown as an act of liberation. In rediscovering her authentic voice, Ifemelu becomes, in Nadiminti's framework, the paradigmatic ethnic writer in the US context, who is able to unproblematically translate her region or ethnicity for a mainstream US audience, without losing her 'authentic' connection to this site.

Although it seems that this act of 'finding voice' returns Ifemelu to an unself-conscious Nigerian English, Adichie emphasises that this is not the same voice Ifemelu had at the beginning of the novel. Indeed, despite Ifemelu's conscious focus on rolling back the Americanised elements, her written voice in the embedded text is shown to be indelibly marked by her US education. In her blog posts, her style is unmistakeably American, using such blatant Americanisms as "the whole shebang" and "big-ass" (326). Speaking to her American audience in 'their' sociolect, her own voice is positioned as 'authentically hybrid,' celebrating her Nigerianness alongside her American education. In Ifemelu's writerly voice, *Americanah* invokes the same claim regarding the author's right to represent her subject matter as do the reviewers in their focus on Adichie's biography. Both emphasise the authenticity of the transnational subjectivity of the writer without problematising the concept of 'authenticity' itself. Ifemelu's voice functions as a literary representation of Nadiminti's vernacular anglophone realism: the homogenous Americanised voice is tempered by a 'vernacular' Nigerian-English accent which grants the speaker authenticity but remains an atmospheric effect of the "bourgeois sociolect" of the American graduate (Nadiminti 382).

The novel is continuously legitimising the authenticity of this voice by deeming other modes of expression to be less legitimate. *Americanah*'s obsession with authenticity is manifest as an implicit judgement of those deemed not 'authentic' enough. This implicit judgement is exemplified by Adichie's satire of Afropolitanism in the novel's depiction of the overly cosmopolitan "Nigerpolitans": "Their voices blurred with foreign accents. *You can't find a decent smoothie in this city! Oh my God, were you at that conference? What this country needs is an active civil society*" (407). In contrast with these irredeemably self-conscious diasporic Africans, Ifemelu is cast as truly 'authentic.' She—markedly—does not have a foreign accent, having consciously returned to her Nigerian one. Ifemelu's preoccupation with authenticity is made explicit later in this scene, where she overhears a conversation in which one of the Nigerpolitans remarks: "*They have the kind of things we can eat*. An unease crept up on Ifemelu." (409). The unease Adichie associates

with the cosmopolitan voice of the Nigerpolitans reinforces the implied contrast with the ease with which Ifemelu uses her own authentic voice. In her characterisation of Ifemelu as an authentic (literary) voice, Adichie legitimises her own writing, especially in contrast to those figures the novel deems to be 'inauthentic.'

Unlike in *Americanah*, where Ifemelu 'rediscovers' her 'authentic' voice after a period of Americanising it, therefore implicitly valorising Adichie's own diasporic voice as 'authentic,' Darling never 'rediscovers' an Africanised voice. By the end of the novel, the narrative voice is explicitly Americanised and presents a strong contrast to Darling's voice at the beginning of the novel. By refusing to resolve this problem of inauthenticity in her protagonist's voice, who ends up with an assimilated American accent, Bulawayo refuses to resolve the contradictions in her own position as a diasporic 'Americanised' writer ventriloquising Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe. Instead of eliding the representational gap between the "framing voice and the inevitably nonbourgeois subjects populating [her] postcolonial narrative world" (Nadiminti 386), Bulawayo instead draws attention to this gap through her protagonist's 'compromised' hybrid identity. If the reception of her short story accuses her of pandering to the Western reader, Darling's embrace of an Americanised voice does not facilely oppose these critiques, but rather faces the complex position of the postcolonial writer head-on.

This anxiety regarding the diasporic subject's alienation from the homeland is further emphasised in a scene in which Darling is on the phone with her childhood friend Chipo, the only member of her friend group to have remained in Zimbabwe. This scene reinforces the internal contradiction that emerges in the novel's critique of its own mode of representation. In a striking parallel to the earlier wedding scene, Darling now seemingly repeats the words of the white woman to her friend:

> I know it's bad, Chipo, I'm so sorry. It pains me to think about it, I say.
>
> What is so bad? Why are you feeling pain? She says.
>
> What have they done to our country. All the suffering, I say.

Well, everywhere where people live, there is suffering, she says.

I know. But last week on the BBC—

But you are not the one suffering. (287)

In this full-circle moment, Darling evokes the same affective response to 'Africa' as the 'well-meaning' white woman. Although she does not have the same perspective as this woman, Darling is in the same structural position, only being able to empathise from afar, despite the fact that she refers to Zimbabwe as 'our country.' In this ironic juxtaposition, Bulawayo highlights Darling's complex position as a diasporic African in the USA in regard to her home Zimbabwe. In this, Bulawayo complicates the question of who is able to speak on behalf of 'Africa.' Rather than resolve the contradiction between "Hitting Budapest" and her later critique of such narratives in *We Need New Names*, this move consolidates the contradiction on the level of narrative. In this, Bulawayo gestures to the complexity of representing Africa in novelistic form without eliding the inherent contradictions this entails. This internal contradiction shapes the narrative of *We Need New Names*, and reflects on Bulawayo's own literary persona.

After listening to Darling's attempt to empathise, Chipo angrily remarks: "It's your country, Darling? Really, it's your country, are you sure?... You left it, Darling, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country?" (288). The repetitive refrain of *It's your country?* verbalises the pervasive anxiety surrounding the diasporic subject's right to both claim and represent their country of origin that haunts the rest of the novel. By ending the novel on this note Bulawayo puts into question the reception of her work as an 'authentic' representation of Africa. While this can be read as a straightforward auto-critique of Bulawayo's writing—particularly her own unreflexive representation of Zimbabwe in "Hitting Budapest"—it simultaneously responds to the discourses of authorly identity and biography that typify Bulawayo's critical reception. As we have seen in the first chapter, Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times* even takes issue—in an otherwise rave review—with the manner in which the

narrative diverges from Bulawayo's own biography. By thus satirising her own diasporic authorhood and drawing attention to the representational gap, Bulawayo troubles the simplistic connection between an author's biography and her writing we find in the reception of minoritised writers.

In this light, the novel's ending, in which Darling attempts—and to a certain extent, fails—to assert her own African identity, becomes increasingly poignant. Bulawayo's final response to Godknow's question "What exactly is an African?" (121) seems to reject an essentialised notion of African identity based on race or place of birth, since Darling and the white settler, who must loudly proclaim "I am an African… just like you!" (121), ironically parallel each other by the end of the novel. Despite their vastly different circumstance, both struggle to assert their Africanness. In answering what exactly is an African writer, then, Bulawayo rejects the essentialising construction of identity in which she—as a minority author in the United Sates—is situated discursively and pushes up against the limits of contemporary ideologies of race and nation.

**III. Conclusion**

Unlike Bulawayo, who, in Darling, chooses to draw attention to the representational gap between a postcolonial writer and her subject matter, Ifemelu's narrative arc resolves these contradictions by positioning her perspective and representational practice as totally legitimate by the end of the novel. Despite the ease with which Ifemelu ostensibly speaks and writes, however, the feeling of unease Ifemelu expresses in response to the Nigerpolitans' foreign accents haunts *Americanah*. This unease, associated with the anxieties surrounding authenticity that the narrative voice expresses, is papered over in the form of Ifemelu's successful re-adoption of her Nigerian identity and re-integration into Nigerian society. In *We Need New Names*, in comparison, this uneasy relationship with authenticity overtly characterises the ending of the novel. By having Darling struggle to reclaim an 'authentic' voice or connection to Zimbabwe, Bulawayo troubles the paradigm of authenticity. While both Adichie and Bulawayo intervene in the discourse of

identity we find in the reception of the work of these authors, only Bulawayo integrates this critique at narrative level. Although *We Need New Names* goes further in deconstructing these ideological concepts, especially in relation to the reception of "Hitting Budapest," *Americanah* is much bolder in its direct denunciation of the co-optation of ethnic minority texts by institutions. Adichie here expresses a distinct awareness of how her writing is co-opted for particular institutional goals. This reading has shown how these authors evince an awareness of the critical discourses that surround their reception. In their responses to these discourses, Adichie and Bulawayo trouble the field's definition of an African writer and propose their own definitions of this concept.

## Conclusion

In my analysis of the reception of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*, I have highlighted how reviews, prizes, academic articles and syllabi translate these novels for various modes of consumption in the global cultural economy. Through close readings, I have also shown how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo respond to the commodification of their novels and their writerly personae. In 2001, Huggan identified a struggle "over the value of cultural difference," in which Anglophone metropolitan culture attempts to define the margins in terms of the "exotic" (32). My study of this translation process and the writers' responses to it considered whether Huggan's paradigm of exoticisation still describes the vectors of ideological translation that occurs when the global literary Anglosphere sanitises the margins for consumption in the metropole.

With *Americanah* in particular, we have seen that this process of translation no longer allies Adichie with the 'postcolonial,' which Huggan argues is attached to novels "as a sales-tag in the context of today's globalised commodity culture" (ix). While *Half of a Yellow Sun*'s reception still evinces vestiges of the 'postcolonial' paradigm, particularly in relation to how the novel is taught at universities, *Americanah* and early 2010s Adichie are translated and consecrated as 'global' commodities aligned with a globalised US culture. Rather than representing Nigerian or 'postcolonial' culture, *Americanah* is extricated from this 'area studies' context and presented to audiences as a new genre of writing. The process by which *Americanah* is translated for global anglophone audiences aligns the novel much more explicitly with the familiar: rather than exoticised, Adichie is Americanised. In *Americanah* in particular, then, we identify a work that aligns with what Nadiminti terms the "global anglophone novel" (376).

In the reception of all three of the novels under investigation, I have identified, as Huggan does, the concept of 'authenticity' circulating as currency of symbolic exchange. One of the central tenets of the global anglophone novel, Nadiminti argues, is its failure to trouble this paradigm of authenticity, which becomes institutionalised in Global South literature at US MFA

creative writing programmes (which count among their graduates both Adichie and Bulawayo). The imperative for authenticity is not only embedded in the material production of the work, as Nadiminti indicates in their study of the MFA, but also in "the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work" which we have traced in the agents of legitimation (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 37). Both *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* register this imperative and express a profound anxiety in relation to it. While *Americanah* invokes this discourse to assert itself as 'truly' authentic, *We Need New Names* writes back against the essentialised notions of authenticity based on the author's identity we find in the reception of these works. In the literary form typified by these novels, it becomes possible to identify the generalised cultural anxiety around authenticity and appropriation. In the wake of scandals such as Lionel Shriver's speech in 2016, which catalysed the discourse around literary appropriation, a further study might examine how more recent literary texts have internalised this discourse, whether as suggestive but tacit unease as we see in *Americanah*, narrative-shaping contradiction, as in *We Need New Names*, or a further literary mode.

A further important factor in the symbolic production of these texts is the necessity for these novels to 'beat' stereotypical representations of Africa. These novels, in other words, are valued for the ability to stage a specific, negative reading through them. In this paradigm, novels must be able to be read as negations of certain demonised Western texts, that have, we might say, been 'delegitimised,' or retroactively consecrated as 'bad' depictions of Africa or the Global South. Exemplary delegitimised writers against which these novels are pitted are Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and the vaguely labelled 'Western media.' My close reading of *We Need New Names* shows that the novel stages this reading internally, in its critique of its own 'Western' representation of Zimbabwe in "Hitting Budapest." In fact, the novel consistently negates itself, both in this auto-critique of its representation of Zimbabwe, and in its negation of its author's authenticity. On the one hand, in its consistent self-negation, *We Need New Names* seems to defy dominant schemas of value. The text situates itself in opposition to the institutional mechanism

of prestige by constantly writing against the means by which novels of its ilk accrue cultural capital. On the other hand, however, it is exactly this oppositional stance that allows *We Need New Names* to gain prestige in certain academic settings. Indeed, as we have seen, *We Need New Names* is very frequently taught in an 'African Literature' context, despite its relative lack of success in terms of reviews and scholarship. This tendency to deconstruct its own mode of representation functions as a form of 'built-in postcoloniality,' an emergent genre of writing Timothy Brennan identifies in Global South metropolitan fiction (203). This new genre, argues Brennan, gives the impression of having been produced with postcolonialist reception in mind. By narrating the problem of reading cultural difference, *We Need New Names* pre-empts the postcolonial teacher's role of problematising representations of the non-West. In this sense, the novel anticipates its own consecration within the academy.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, Adichie uses a similar reflexive 'text-within-a-text' approach to fictionalise the literary field on her own terms. Unlike Bulawayo, Adichie's metafictional approach is affirmative. In the legitimation of Ugwu's political realism and non-institutionality, Ifemelu's 'regained' authenticity, and the 'Afro-optimistic' ending of *Americanah*, Adichie registers the unevenness of the global literary field without negating the value that it assigns to her work. Despite these differences, all three novels utilise this formal innovation to respond to the existing gap between the discourses of prestige and the novels' content. The prevalence of metafictional elements such as author-protagonists, embedded texts and the fictionalisation of 'finding voice' in literature by consecrated African authors from this period registers this struggle over meaning that is being waged in the literary field. I find similar metafictional formal structures which critique the oppressive nature of consecrating institutions in other literary contexts; Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) is paradigmatic example of this in relation to the reception of African American writers. Like the novels under examination in this thesis, *Erasure* has also been a critical and institutional success, particularly in recent years, notably having been adapted to film in 2023. It is apparent that consecrating institutions have

evolved by absorbing the critiques posed by works such as these. Regarding the institutionalisation of Adichie's critique of the 'single story,' this has created a different kind of trap for African authors, who are faced by the imperative to 'go beyond' this narrative. In light of the institutionalisation of both their novels and their critiques, what remains to be seen is how African and minoritised writers will innovate their works to face these new challenges.

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