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The Struggle for Belonging in Nigerian Diasporic and Postcolonial Novels

Itiveh John Oghenoro [1]

Abstract: This study explores the theme of belonging in Nigerian diasporic and postcolonial novels, focusing on how issues of identity, migration, and displacement are represented in the works of key Nigerian authors: Americana by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Open City by Teju Cole, The Famished Road by Ben Okri, and Waiting for an Angel by Helon Habila. The research examines how these authors portray the struggles of their protagonists to define their sense of belonging in both the diasporic context and postcolonial Nigeria. Through a comparative analysis, the study highlights the centrality of belonging as a theme in navigating cultural, racial, political, and spiritual complexities. The study adopts a literary analytical approach, utilizing a blend of postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, to explore how the protagonists in the selected novels grapple with their hybrid identities, alienation, and the tensions between the homeland and the host country. It investigates how these characters negotiate belonging, often experiencing displacement and identity crises that result from their encounters with global migration, political instability, and cultural assimilation. The findings suggest that belonging in these novels is not a static or fixed concept but a fluid and ongoing process, influenced by historical, social, and personal factors. The study further reveals the role of race, class, memory, and political oppression in shaping characters' identities and their perceptions of home. The protagonists in Americana, Open City, The Famished Road, and Waiting for an Angel each face challenges in reconciling their sense of belonging in both the diaspora and in postcolonial Nigeria, offering a multifaceted understanding of the intersections between personal identity and national belonging. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the significance of literature in exploring complex issues of migration and belonging in the postcolonial world. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on diasporic and postcolonial literature and provides insights into the personal and societal impacts of migration, identity formation, and the search for belonging. The findings of this study have implications for future literary scholarship, education, and policy discussions on migration, diaspora, and belonging in the contemporary global context.

Keywords: Belonging; Diasporic Literature; Postcolonial Literature; Identity; Migration.

[1]*Department of English and Literary Studies, College of Education Warri, Delta State, Nigeria*

Introduction

The theme of belonging in literature, particularly in the context of Nigerian diasporic and postcolonial novels, is one of profound significance. The quest for belonging is intricately linked to issues of identity, migration, exile, and the interplay between the past and the present. In the Nigerian context, where historical trauma caused by colonialism, war, migration, and global displacement have shaped the national consciousness; the notion of belonging becomes increasingly complex. The struggle to belong is not merely about finding a physical space within a society, but also about constructing an identity that is self-aware, transcendent, and resilient in the face of both colonial and contemporary challenges (Ene, 2016; Baugh, 2018; Duru, 2021; Sorinola, 2021).

The concept of belonging is intertwined with historical and sociopolitical conditions (Taşkesen, 2021). For Nigerian diaspora writers, their struggle for belonging is often marked by displacement—either voluntary or forced—due to the larger socio-political context of Nigerian postcolonial reality. Nigeria's colonial history, its postcolonial struggles, the Biafran War, and ongoing political instability have all contributed to a landscape of migration, both internal and external (Ajayi, Udo, Falola & Kirk-Greene, 2025). Consequently, many Nigerian writers and intellectuals have sought new modes of belonging, balancing their inherited cultural identities with the forces of globalization, Westernization, and the intersections of race, class, and gender in the West.

Additionally, belonging in postcolonial literature has a dual meaning: belonging to the land of one's birth and belonging within a larger, often foreign, socio-political context. This dual sense of belonging is central to the diasporic experience, where individuals navigate the tension between loyalty to their homeland and the struggle for integration or recognition in their host countries (Banshiwal, 2024). For Nigerian postcolonial and diasporic writers, their works serve as a medium for negotiating these tensions. Writers address the personal and collective ramifications of colonial history, and their narratives become a site of resistance against cultural erasure, while also offering insight into the painful and complex process of reconciling national and personal identities (Ojuola, 2024; Kedia & Tiwari, 2024).

In Nigerian diasporic literature, the struggle for belonging is often depicted through characters who experience alienation and marginalization, both in the countries they have migrated to and in relation to their homeland (Duru, 2021). Diasporic writers frequently depict how individuals struggle to negotiate their identities between the different cultural contexts they inhabit. These works often explore themes such as racial discrimination, cultural dislocation, and the yearning for home, as well as the internalized conflict between the "old" and the "new." (Ene, 2016; Qazi, 2022).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana* is a diasporic text that deals with the themes of belonging. The novel follows the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who moves to the United States for higher education. Ifemelu grapples with issues of race, identity, and belonging as she navigates the complexities of the American social and cultural landscape while simultaneously yearning for a sense of connection to her Nigerian roots. Ifemelu's struggle illustrates the diasporic experience of simultaneously being at home and not at home, belonging and not belonging. Teju Cole's *Open City* presents another example of the tension between belonging and alienation. Julius, a Nigerian-born psychiatrist living in New York, constantly oscillates between his Nigerian past and his present life in the United States. Cole explores the psychological and emotional toll of living between two worlds, emphasizing how the past—whether personal or historical—continually shapes one's sense of belonging in the present.

The postcolonial experience within Nigeria itself is another crucial arena for exploring the struggle for belonging. While diasporic writers grapple with the challenges of displacement in foreign lands, Nigerian writers who remain within the country must contend with the legacies of colonialism that continue to shape their national identity. Nigeria's postcolonial period has been characterized by political instability, economic challenges, and internal conflicts, all of which affect how its citizens perceive their place in the national project (Onyejizu, 2021; Obikaeze et al., 2023).

In novels like Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow*

Sun, the struggle for belonging is framed against the backdrop of political turmoil and war. Adichie's novel, set during the Nigerian Civil War (Biafran War), focuses on characters who struggle with the question of loyalty to their homeland and the idea of national identity amidst the horrors of war. The sense of belonging to a nation becomes entangled with issues of survival, resistance, and personal loss. Helon Habila's novel presents another postcolonial struggle for belonging, but with a focus on the internal disillusionment of Nigerian society. In Habila's work, the quest for belonging takes on a more individualistic dimension as characters try to reconcile their own personal identities with the collective memory of a nation in crisis. The sense of estrangement in Waiting for an Angel underscores the alienation many Nigerians feel from both the political leadership and the promises of postcolonial independence.

The struggle for belonging in Nigerian diasporic and postcolonial novels reveals the intricacies of identity formation in the wake of colonialism and migration. Nigerian writers across genres and generations have depicted the internal and external struggles of their characters as they grapple with issues of cultural dislocation, racial discrimination, and the need for recognition in both local and global contexts. Through their literary works, these writers offer critical insights into the ways in which belonging is not merely a fixed state, but a dynamic, ongoing negotiation of history, culture, and selfhood.

The dialectic of Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory has long been concerned with the effects of colonialism on both individual and collective identities. As Edward Said (1978) argues in *Orientalism*, colonialism operates as a structure of knowledge that produces "otherness" and displaces the self. In postcolonial literature, the question of belonging is inherently tied to the legacy of colonial domination and the struggle for self-representation in the aftermath of imperialism. In the case of Nigerian literature, this struggle is particularly acute given Nigeria's colonial history under British rule, which left a complex imprint on its national identity.

The works of Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have been central to postcolonial discourse, addressing the challenges of cultural identity, nation-building, and political corruption in the wake of colonialism. Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) portrays the impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures and identities, with the protagonist, Okonkwo, struggling to maintain his traditional sense of belonging in the face of European encroachment. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), interrogate post-independence Nigeria, exploring the fragmentation of national identity and the impact of political instability on the sense of belonging within the nation.

Scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Frantz Fanon (1963) have expanded on postcolonial theory by emphasizing the complexity of identity formation in the postcolonial era. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" and the "third space" emphasizes the fluidity of postcolonial identity. In his view, belonging is never static, as individuals in postcolonial societies are constantly negotiating multiple identities, often in tension with one another. Nigerian writers, particularly in the diaspora, engage with Bhabha's ideas by illustrating how characters' senses of belonging are informed by both local and global contexts.

Diaspora Theory

Diaspora theory has been particularly influential in understanding the experiences of Nigerian writers living outside their country. The term "diaspora" refers to the movement, migration, or scattering of a people from their original homeland, and it often carries with it a sense of longing, alienation, and cultural negotiation. Diaspora studies, therefore, examines the dynamics of belonging in the context of migration, exile, and displacement. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1990) have explored how diasporic identities are formed through processes of hybridization and negotiation of multiple cultural affiliations. Hall's notion of "cultural hybridity" suggests that belonging in diasporic contexts is not about returning to an idealized version of the homeland but about creating new forms of identity that emerge from the interaction of multiple cultural influences. This concept resonates with the experiences of Nigerian diasporic characters who are often torn between their African heritage and the cultural demands of the societies they inhabit. In the works of Nigerian diaspora writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole, and Helon Habila,

hybridity is a central theme in the struggle for belonging.

Adichie's *Americana* (2013) is a key text in diasporic literature, highlighting the complexities of belonging in the context of race and immigration. Ifemelu, the novel's protagonist, grapples with questions of racial identity, immigration, and cultural assimilation in the United States. Through Ifemelu's journey, Adichie examines how belonging is negotiated across borders and how the experience of migration reshapes personal and collective identities. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria after years of living abroad further complicates her sense of belonging, as she must reconcile her American identity with the realities of life in postcolonial Nigeria.

Similarly, Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) portrays the experience of Julius, a Nigerian psychiatrist living in New York, who feels both alienated and dislocated within the city. His sense of belonging is fractured as he navigates the intersections of race, memory, and the legacies of colonialism. Cole's exploration of memory and identity in a transnational context aligns with diasporic studies, particularly the idea that belonging is an ongoing process that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.

Hybridity and Identity Formation

Hybridity, as discussed earlier in Bhabha's work, has been a central theme in postcolonial and diasporic studies. In Nigerian literature, hybridity captures the complex, evolving identities of individuals who are situated between two or more cultural worlds. Hybridity not only reflects the cultural assimilation and adaptation that diasporic individuals undergo, but also the tension between conflicting cultural influences. For Nigerian diasporic writers, hybridity is a double-edged sword—while it can provide opportunities for self-reinvention, it can also produce feelings of alienation and loss (Simiyu, Musungu & Orina, 2021; Ojuola, 2024).

In the *Famished Road* (1991), Ben Okri's protagonist Azaro exists in a space of hybridized identity. He lives between the physical and spiritual worlds, embodying a fusion of indigenous African spirituality and the material world. Azaro's experience reflects the complexities of belonging in postcolonial societies, where the past (both colonial and pre-colonial) continues to influence contemporary identities. Azaro's ambiguous position mirrors the hybridity of postcolonial Nigeria, where tradition and modernity collide, and the struggle for belonging is marked by the desire to reclaim lost cultural identities while navigating the realities of modern life.

The interplay of hybridity and belonging is also evident in the works of writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole, who highlight how diasporic characters reconcile their identities within different cultural and racial contexts. Hybridity allows these authors to present characters who are simultaneously part of their homeland and the globalized world, suggesting that belonging in such spaces is never a clear-cut, static identity.

Nigerian Diasporic Novels

The exploration of belonging in Nigerian diasporic literature has been a focus of considerable scholarly attention. Nigerian writers in the diaspora address the experience of alienation, displacement, and the search for a new sense of home. These writers often grapple with the tension between the home they left behind and the new identities they must forge in the host countries. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana* has garnered significant critical attention due to its nuanced portrayal of the immigrant experience and the struggle for belonging. Scholars such as Omolola Ijeoma Akinyemi (2016) have analyzed how *Americana* critiques the social and racial dynamics in America, particularly through the lens of Ifemelu's experience as a Nigerian immigrant. Akinyemi contends that Adichie's novel interrogates the intersections of race, identity, and migration, illustrating how African immigrants must navigate the complexities of being both "American" and "African." This negotiation of belonging is a central concern in Nigerian diasporic literature, where the concept of home is continually shifting.

Teju Cole's *Open City* also examines the diasporic experience, particularly the psychological and emotional effects of living between cultures. Scholars such as Fiona McCulloch (2013) have explored how

Cole uses New York as a space where the protagonist, Julius, experiences his fractured sense of self. McCulloch argues that Julius's identity is shaped by his experiences of exile and his complex relationship with the city, which represents both belonging and alienation. The novel's exploration of the city as a site of memory, trauma, and displacement speaks to broader concerns about the struggles of belonging in a globalized world.

Helon Habila's Waiting for an Angel provides another critical lens through which to explore the theme of belonging in Nigerian literature. Set in postcolonial Nigeria during a period of political unrest, the novel explores the alienation felt by its protagonist, who is caught between the dream of a better future and the grim realities of his country's socio-political condition. Critics like Chijioke Ohuocha (2005) have argued that Habila's work underscores the difficulty of finding belonging in a society marked by corruption, violence, and the disillusionment of postcolonial independence.

Nigerian Postcolonial Novels

The question of belonging is also central to Nigerian postcolonial literature, where writers focus on the internal struggles of individuals within Nigeria. Nigerian postcolonial novels reflect the tension between indigenous cultural identities and the legacies of colonialism. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Helon Habila interrogate the complexities of belonging within the context of political instability, social fragmentation, and national identity crises in postcolonial Nigeria (Asma, 2015).

Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) is an early exploration of postcolonial Nigeria's struggle to forge a coherent sense of belonging after independence. The novel critiques the corruption and moral decay that characterized Nigeria's political landscape, which undermined the sense of national unity and belonging. Achebe's exploration of postcolonial alienation is echoed in many contemporary Nigerian works, where the question of what it means to belong to a nation that has failed to live up to its postcolonial promises remains a central concern. Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1972) provides a personal and political account of the psychological toll of imprisonment during Nigeria's civil unrest. Soyinka's work illuminates the ways in which political repression and violence contribute to a fragmented sense of belonging, both within the national context and within oneself. His writings examine the relationship between individual agency and national identity, highlighting the alienating forces of political dictatorship and state violence.

The struggle for belonging in Nigerian diasporic and postcolonial novels is a complex and multifaceted theme. Through the lens of diaspora theory, postcolonial theory, and hybridity, Nigerian writers explore the intersection of migration, identity, culture, and history in their depiction of belonging (Ene, 2016; Simiyu *et al*., 2021). Both diasporic and postcolonial narratives reveal the internal and external conflicts of individuals who must navigate the turbulent terrain of cultural negotiation, racial discrimination, and the legacies of colonialism. The scholarship on Nigerian literature underscores the importance of these themes in understanding how identity and belonging are constructed and deconstructed in the aftermath of colonialism and the dynamics of globalization.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design, as the primary objective is to gain a deep, contextual understanding of the theme of belonging in Nigerian literature. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of the narrative techniques, character development, and thematic concerns present in the selected novels. The research is interpretative, meaning that it seeks to understand the meanings behind the representations of belonging in the texts, drawing on literary theory and cultural studies. The approach is textual analysis, which involves close reading and critical interpretation of the primary novels. Textual analysis is particularly suited to this study because it allows for the examination of narrative strategies, character construction, and thematic development in literature. Furthermore, the study uses a comparative analysis of selected novels to identify common themes and differences in how Nigerian authors approach

the theme of belonging. The comparative method allows for an exploration of how Nigerian writers from different generations, contexts, and locations portray the struggles for identity, home, and community in relation to the broader postcolonial experience.

Selection of Texts

The texts chosen for analysis are central to the contemporary discourse on Nigerian literature and the theme of belonging. These novels include works by both diasporic writers and authors based in Nigeria. The selection is based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance to the Theme of Belonging**: The novels selected deal explicitly or implicitly with the theme of belonging, whether through characters' struggles with cultural identity, migration, exile, or postcolonial disillusionment. The characters' experiences of alienation, homecoming, and self-discovery are key to the thematic focus of the study.
2. **Cultural and Geopolitical Contexts**: The texts offer diverse perspectives on belonging, representing both the experience of Nigerian characters in the diaspora and those within Nigeria. By including works set in various geographical contexts, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how belonging is constructed in relation to both local and global contexts.
3. **Prominence in Contemporary Nigerian Literature**: The authors selected are considered influential within the canon of Nigerian literature and have garnered significant attention from scholars, critics, and readers. Their works have sparked discussions on identity, migration, and postcolonial belonging.

The primary novels selected for this study are:

- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's** *Americana* (2013)
- **Teju Cole's** *Open City* (2011)
- **Ben Okri's** *The Famished Road* (1991)
- **Helon Habila's** *Waiting for an Angel* (2002)

These novels were chosen because they not only explore the theme of belonging in depth but also engage with critical issues such as race, memory, migration, cultural assimilation, and the search for a new sense of home.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this study consists of four Nigerian novels: *Americana* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Open City* by Teju Cole, *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri, and *Waiting for an Angel* by Helon Habila. These texts will be subjected to **close reading**, which involves a detailed examination of the language, narrative structure, characterization, and thematic elements that pertain to the concept of belonging.

Secondary data will be drawn from scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Nigerian literature, diaspora studies, and postcolonial theory. These secondary sources will provide theoretical and contextual background, helping to situate the primary texts within broader literary and cultural discussions. The analysis of the primary texts will focus on the following aspects:

1. **Character Development and Identity Formation**: How do the protagonists' struggles with belonging evolve throughout the novel? What are the internal and external forces that shape their sense of self?
2. **Cultural Conflict and Hybridity**: How do the characters navigate the tension between their indigenous culture and the cultures they encounter, either in the diaspora or within postcolonial Nigeria?
3. **Themes of Displacement, Alienation, and Return**: How do characters experience and respond to the feeling of displacement? What role does the idea of "home" play in their sense of belonging?

4. **Narrative Techniques**: What narrative strategies do the authors use to explore the theme of belonging? How do these strategies reflect the broader socio-political and cultural contexts in which the stories unfold?

DATA ANALYSIS

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the complexities of belonging through the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who moves to the United States for education. Ifemelu's journey is not only a physical migration but also a psychological and cultural navigation of what it means to belong in a world that constantly categorizes and racializes individuals based on their identity.

Identity and Belonging in Diaspora

Ifemelu's struggle with belonging in *Americanah* is largely defined by her experience of race in America, which she had not encountered in Nigeria. Upon arriving in the U.S., she confronts the complexities of American racial identity, which forces her to reassess her own sense of self. Ifemelu's realization that she is "black" in America, whereas in Nigeria she was simply "Igbo," highlights the arbitrary and constructed nature of racial identities and their power in shaping belonging in the diaspora. Her blog, The Non-American Black, becomes a crucial tool for exploring this theme, as it allows her to articulate her sense of displacement and confusion about her identity in a new social environment.

Ifemelu's struggle is also evident in her relationships with other characters in the novel, such as her romantic relationship with Obinze and her interactions with both Nigerian and African-American communities in the United States. Through her relationships, Adichie demonstrates how belonging is not a static or singular experience, but one that is constantly negotiated through interactions with others who have different understandings of identity, race, and culture. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria after several years in the U.S. further complicates her sense of belonging. She finds herself alienated from the country she once called home, struggling to reconcile her Americanized self with the expectations of Nigerian society.

Hybridity and Homecoming

Adichie uses Ifemelu's return to Nigeria as a way to explore the theme of hybridity, as the protagonist finds herself caught between two worlds. The postcolonial theory of hybridity, as outlined by Homi K. Bhabha, is central to understanding Ifemelu's identity transformation. Ifemelu's experiences in America force her to confront the contradictions inherent in her identity—being Nigerian but also shaped by Western culture. This hybrid identity makes her feel like an outsider in both America and Nigeria, unable to fully belong in either place.

Her sense of belonging is further complicated by the cultural shifts she witnesses upon returning to Nigeria. While she is initially alienated by the changes in her home country, such as the rapid modernization and the emergence of new cultural norms, Ifemelu ultimately embraces her hybrid identity, finding comfort in the fluidity of belonging. In this sense, Adichie presents a nuanced portrayal of the Nigerian diaspora experience, where belonging is not fixed but continually negotiated.

Open City by Teju Cole

In *Open City*, Teju Cole examines the theme of belonging through the experiences of Julius, a Nigerian-born psychiatrist living in New York City. Julius's wandering through the city, both physically and emotionally, is symbolic of his search for a sense of place and identity in the face of displacement and personal loss.

Alienation and the Search for Belonging

Julius's experience of alienation is central to his sense of belonging in the narrative. As a Nigerian living in New York, Julius is constantly aware of his status as an outsider. His interactions with people in the city—ranging from his encounters with fellow immigrants to his relationships with native New Yorkers—

illustrate the fragmented nature of belonging in the diaspora. Julius's narrative is deeply introspective, reflecting his internal struggles with identity and his attempts to reconcile his past in Nigeria with his present in the U.S.

What makes Julius's experience distinct from Ifemelu's in Americana is his detachment from the concept of home. Julius has no desire to return to Nigeria, nor does he fully embrace his life in America. He remains indifferent to the racial dynamics in the U.S., rarely confronting the racial issues that Ifemelu grapples with in *Americanah*. His search for belonging, therefore, is less about cultural confrontation and more about a personal, existential search for meaning. This passive exploration of identity speaks to the complex and often internalized nature of belonging in the diaspora.

Memory, Trauma, and Belonging

Teju Cole also introduces the theme of memory and trauma in Julius's narrative, which complicates his sense of belonging. Julius is haunted by memories of his childhood in Nigeria and the traumatic experiences of war and loss. These memories are fragmented and elusive, reflecting the disjointed nature of his identity. As he wanders through New York, he encounters reminders of his past, but these encounters are never fully reconciled. This disconnection from his past further exacerbates his sense of not belonging anywhere.

Julius's fragmented identity is emblematic of the diasporic condition, where the past and present, home and abroad, cannot be neatly integrated. His sense of belonging, therefore, remains unresolved, reflective of the broader challenges faced by diasporic individuals in finding a stable, coherent sense of identity.

The Famished Road by Ben Okri

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* is a complex and allegorical exploration of belonging in postcolonial Nigeria. The novel follows the journey of Azaro, an abiku (spirit child), who navigates the material and spiritual worlds in a quest for meaning and belonging.

Belonging and the Abiku Myth

Azaro's identity is tied to the concept of abiku, a spirit child who is destined to die and return to the spiritual realm. This cyclical existence reflects the tensions between life and death, belonging and alienation. Azaro's struggle with belonging is rooted in his existence as both a physical being and a spiritual entity. His journey through the novel is marked by his attempts to escape his predetermined fate as an abiku and forge a connection to the world of the living.

The abiku myth symbolizes the broader postcolonial experience of liminality—existing between two worlds and never fully belonging to either. Azaro's identity is fractured, and his sense of belonging is constantly in flux, shaped by the tensions between his spiritual calling and his desire for a life rooted in the physical world. This duality reflects the postcolonial struggle for identity, where individuals are torn between tradition and modernity, the past and the future, the local and the global.

The Role of Community

Azaro's relationship with his family and the community around him highlights the importance of collective belonging in postcolonial societies. Despite his spiritual nature, Azaro's interactions with his parents, neighbors, and friends anchor him to the physical world. The community's efforts to help him resist his abiku fate reflect the collective desire to overcome the challenges of postcolonial existence. However, Azaro's eventual departure from this community underscores the tension between individual desire and communal expectations in the search for belonging.

Waiting for an Angel by Helon Habila

In Waiting for an Angel, Helon Habila explores the theme of belonging through the character of Lomba, a Nigerian journalist living in Lagos during the military dictatorship of the 1990s. Lomba's narrative is one

of personal and political displacement, as he grapples with the oppressive realities of life under authoritarian rule.

Political Displacement and the Struggle for Belonging

Lomba's sense of belonging is deeply affected by the political climate in Nigeria. The military dictatorship has fractured the social and political fabric of the nation, leaving individuals like Lomba feeling alienated from their own country. His exile, both literal and metaphorical, is indicative of the broader struggle for belonging experienced by Nigerians during periods of political instability. Lomba's longing for a sense of home is disrupted by the corrupt and violent regime, which forces him into a constant state of uncertainty and disillusionment.

The Power of Art in Reclaiming Belonging

Lomba's role as a writer provides him with a means of asserting his identity and grappling with his sense of displacement. Writing becomes a form of resistance and a way to reclaim his sense of belonging in a country that has lost its moral compass. Through Lomba's character, Habila suggests that belonging in postcolonial Nigeria is not only a personal endeavor but also a collective one, shaped by the political struggles of the nation.

Comparative Analysis

Criteria	Americanah (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)	Open City (Teju Cole)	The Famished Road (Ben Okri)	Waiting for an Angel (Helon Habila)
Protagonist's Struggle for Belonging	Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman, grapples with race and identity in America and later returns to Nigeria, feeling alienated in both places.	Julius, a Nigerian-born psychiatrist, feels detached from both Nigeria and America, wandering through New York.	Azaro, an abiku (spirit child), experiences a spiritual and physical struggle for belonging between the realms of life and death.	Lomba, a journalist, faces political displacement under military dictatorship in Nigeria, seeking a sense of belonging in a fractured society.
Key Themes	Race, migration, identity, cultural assimilation, hybridity, return to homeland.	Alienation, memory, wandering, detachment, fragmented identity.	Spirituality, postcolonial identity, life vs. death, liminality.	Political oppression, displacement, identity, the search for home in a corrupt society.
Narrative Techniques	First-person narrator, blog entries, introspection, exploration of racial and cultural identity through personal experiences.	Fragmented narrative, flâneur-style wandering, fragmented memories, introspective narrative.	Magical realism, allegorical storytelling, blending of the spiritual and physical worlds.	Realist narrative, political commentary, exploration of personal identity within a politically unstable context.
Cultural Context	Migration and racial dynamics in the U.S., the return to postcolonial Nigeria, hybrid identity in the diaspora.	Globalization, dislocation, the immigrant experience in New York, fragmented diasporic identity.	Postcolonial Nigeria, symbolic and metaphysical themes, tension between tradition and modernity.	Postcolonial Nigeria under military dictatorship, the quest for justice and stability in a politically corrupt society.
Hybridity and Displacement	Hybridity in Ifemelu's experience of being Nigerian and American; displacement felt both in the U.S. and in Nigeria upon her return.	Rootlessness, detachment, lack of cultural attachment, internalized alienation.	Azaro's liminality as an abiku, experiencing both material and spiritual worlds, symbolic of postcolonial dislocation.	Lomba's displacement within his own country due to political instability, searching for a sense of home amidst oppression.

Return to Homeland/Homecoming	Ifemelu returns to Nigeria but finds herself alienated by both Americanized identity and the changes in Nigeria.	Julius does not desire to return to Nigeria; his detachment keeps him from seeking belonging anywhere.	Azaro's return to the material world (if only temporarily) mirrors the cycles of postcolonial identity in a fractured society.	Lomba's homecoming is politically charged; his search for belonging is tied to the restoration of his country's moral and political stability.
Alienation	Alienation due to race and class in America, and a feeling of estrangement from Nigeria upon return.	Alienation due to a lack of cultural or personal roots, drifting through life without a sense of attachment.	Azaro's alienation as an abiku—caught between two worlds, never fully accepted in either.	Lomba's alienation due to political instability, corruption, and the erosion of national identity under dictatorship.
Social and Political Engagement	Strong engagement with issues of race, identity, class, and postcolonial struggle in both Nigerian and American contexts.	Indirect commentary on race, displacement, and the personal experience of living in a globalized world.	Indirect political engagement through the allegory of postcolonial Nigeria's instability, yet deeply metaphysical.	Direct political engagement, focusing on the personal cost of dictatorship, censorship, and violence in postcolonial Nigeria.
Resolution of Belonging	A complex, unresolved return; Ifemelu's identity remains hybrid, and she continues to navigate her place in both Nigeria and the U.S.	Julius's search for belonging remains passive, without a clear resolution or return to any one place or identity.	Azaro's journey is cyclical, indicating that belonging may not be fully achieved, but is a constant negotiation between life and death.	Lomba's search for belonging is tied to Nigeria's future, but his journey remains incomplete, suggesting that personal belonging is linked to national justice.

All four protagonists face complex struggles with belonging, but their experiences are shaped by different contexts (diasporic, spiritual, political). Ifemelu, Julius, Azaro, and Lomba all wrestle with internal and external forces that shape their identities and their sense of home. Each novel explores the concept of hybridity in its own way. In Americanah, Ifemelu's hybrid identity reflects the intersection of Nigerian and American cultures. In Open City, Julius's rootlessness speaks to a more existential form of displacement. Azaro's dual existence in The Famished Road represents hybridity in a metaphysical sense, while Lomba's political displacement in Waiting for an Angel underscores how external forces of oppression contribute to the sense of being out of place. All four protagonists experience a form of al ienation or displacement. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria does not restore her sense of belonging, mirroring the theme of alienation found in Julius's detachment and Lomba's estrangement from his country due to political instability. Azaro's "return" to life is interrupted by his abiku nature, making his search for belonging perpetual.

The novels differ significantly in their narrative styles. Americanah uses a first-person blog format, which allows the reader to delve into Ifemelu's evolving identity. Open City utilizes a fragmented narrative structure to depict Julius's inner turmoil, while The Famished Road employs magical realism to reflect Azaro's dual existence. In contrast, waiting for an Angel uses political realism to anchor Lomba's personal search for belonging in the socio-political landscape of Nigeria.

Americanah and Waiting for an Angel have a more explicit focus on political and social themes, such as race, migration, and political oppression. In comparison, Open City is more focused on internal alienation and the personal, existential crises of its protagonist, while The Famished Road integrates metaphysical concerns with its postcolonial context, using the abiku myth to explore belonging in a more symbolic, rather than overtly political, manner.

The cultural contexts in which the characters struggle for belonging are also distinct. Ifemelu's experience in the U.S. and return to Nigeria in Americanah highlights the challenges of transnational identity. Julius in Open City is more interested in exploring the psychological aspect of belonging, while Azaro in The Famished Road reflects on the tensions of postcolonial Nigerian society through the lens of spiritual displacement. Lomba's quest for belonging in Waiting for an Angel is grounded firmly in the political and historical realities of a postcolonial nation under dictatorship.

Conclusion and Implication of Findings

The analysis of Americanah, Open City, The Famished Road, and Waiting for an Angel reveals the multifaceted nature of belonging in Nigerian diasporic and postcolonial literature. The characters in these novels experience displacement, alienation, and hybridity as they navigate complex cultural, political, and social landscapes. Through their struggles, the novels highlight the deep psychological and emotional challenges of finding a sense of belonging in the face of colonial legacies, migration, and political upheaval. Each author uses narrative techniques and thematic concerns to offer a unique perspective on the question of home, identity, and community, ultimately suggesting that belonging is a fluid and evolving concept shaped by both personal and collective histories.

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16. You have to rework the paper from a thesis status to fit into a paper. You don't have to undertake a study of the four texts. Structurally, the paper lacks the fluidity of an essay. It still reads like a thesis. Nice try!