

**IMAGERY AND ANIMAL SYMBOLISM IN CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S *THE
FISHERMEN***

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other university

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents Peter Mwangi Gaate and my mum Hannah Njeri Mwangi.

Thank you for taking me to school and encouraging me to read. I also dedicate this work to my siblings for standing with me through the studies.

To Ann Nduta, George, Mwangi and Chanisse I love you. Thank you for your encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a literary analysis of Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*. It investigates the use of animal symbols, imagery and the effectiveness of journey motif as part of imagery in the text. The study identifies symbols and imagery the author deploys in the text to add a deep layer of meaning. I observe that the animal symbols and images the author uses in the text reveal the underlying animosity amongst various tribes and communities in Nigeria. However, the author seeks to unearth the underlying problem and expose colonialism as the onset of destabilized communities in Nigeria. The use of a family tragedy is a strategy the author uses to capture the reader's imagination, draw a vivid imagination and bring to consciousness the ills committed by colonialization and poor leadership that has galloped post-independence states to a state of violence and anarchy. I argue that through the images of Father, Mother, Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Ben, Obioma displays the real image of Nigeria's political wrangles and it affects the societies. Through Ikenna and Boja's unending fights the novel reveals the unending ethnicity and tribalism in Nigeria. However, through Obembe and Ben the novel suggests hope to the nation as the two young boys struggle to find a solution to the causes of the family defragmentation. Additionally, I link the journey motif and emblems as ways of reflection of self-taken by the narrator to us the readers to embark together with the characters as we read. The narrator, through the writer, engages us into an additional journey of reflection and introspect not only on the short fallings of the fictional characters but also our own. By so doing the purgation of the ails and ills of the characters are understood from an oneiric in understanding the fictional characters. I argue that by looking at the imagery and the symbolism in *The Fishermen*, Obioma invites us to defamiliarise the old and understand the standing of not only Nigeria but our countries and continents as well. This creates a journey of space as well as time from the pre-colonial to the colonial, independence and post- post-independence

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

The Fishermen narrates a story of a family living in Nigeria in the 1990s. The story mainly revolves around four adventurous boys who defy their parents' warning and explore (fishing) in a dangerous river. It is at the river that the boys interact with a soothsayer who casts a doom in the family. The text contributes to a corpus of West African literary creativity, where authors deploy figurative language to critique social ills. The use of symbols and images is very prevalent in African literature. These fictional works deploy symbols and imagery intentionally to make the reader recognize and understand the uniqueness of African literary creativity. Symbols and images are frequently used even in African oral literature. The contemporary writers heavily borrow symbols from their folklore to create contextual meaning in their work. Different scholars have defined symbolism differently; Bergan and Epstein define symbolism as the "ordinary object charged with additional significance" (173). This means that every symbol has its literal and referential meaning. The significance of symbolism is not mainly laid on the surface meaning- literal but, the unrevealed meaning, its in-depth meaning. Therefore, the gist of this study attempts to unravel the deep layers of meanings communicated in *The Fishermen*.

The author captures a society ravaged by social, political and economic problems. Such issues improve the content of texts by translating meaning through associations in what Harmon William argues that, "a text communicates beyond what is explicitly and extrinsically stated, to suggest other meaning" (32). This argument is supported by Caroline Spurgeon who points out that the association that symbols represent relates to different things hence creating a deeper layer of meaning. Spurgeon further argues that symbols are stylistic features in a work of art that "stands for, represent or denote something else" (2). She elucidates that symbols create

mental pictures that stimulate the mind. Hence, symbolism uses what is within our sensory repository to enable us not just understand what is being referred to by comparison, but goes further to capture something beyond the referenced so as to bring in a deeper understanding and meaning of the symbols used. Therefore, it is the role of the reader to decode the symbols in the text and give them meaning according to his/ her understanding and interpretation of them as depicted in the literary work. Spurgeon thus echoes my understanding when she further says that an image can be defined as a "likeness... a representation...an idea that closely resembles something...artificial imitations or representations of the external form of an object" (4). In African literature, symbolism is an important device that helps the reader to fully understand the contextual meaning communicated in the text that the writer uses either to mask his or her message from censorship or as a stylistic device. Imagery according to Gachanja Kiai, "is the art of image projection in a work of art to represent descriptively things, actions, or even abstract ideas"(5) which reiterates Spurgeon's arguments. Kiai points out that the function of imagery is to heighten an idea in the mind of the reader for the creation of a deeper meaning The imagination of the reader receives and responds to articulate symbolism and imagery." (6)

About Chigozie Obioma and *The Fishermen*

Obioma, the author of *The Fishermen*, is a Nigerian who was born in Akure - South-West of Nigeria in 1986. Obioma was born in a large family of 12 children and was brought up in Igbo and Yoruba cultures. He is a graduate of Cyprus University and currently is an associate professor of literature at the University of Nebraska, United States of America. His debut novel, *The Fishermen*, was a finalist for the *Man Booker Prize* 2015. The text narrates a story of a family made up of six siblings, but the focus of the story is in the bitter rivalry of the first four boys in the family.

Literature is a re-creation and combination of social values, attitudes and worldview. Critical analysis of sampled images and symbols drawn from the study text. Kiai comments that

symbolism and imagery is the looking lens through which the meaning of the texts is understood (2). A critical examination of *The Fishermen* locates a deliberate use of animal symbols and images as well as the journey motif, to examine concerns that Obioma raises through the text. They portray and comment on the embedded social and political issues of post-colonial Nigeria. A study of the use of animal symbols and images and the journey motif, would best facilitate a broader understanding and appreciation of *The Fishermen*.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In many literatures, both oral and written, there is an extensive use of journey motifs and animal characters. Often, these animal characters and journey motifs are used in unique ways in different texts to present the underlying message in their usage. Chigozie Obioma, in *The Fisherman* relates key aspects of the story, by focusing on animal imagery and symbols as well and journey motifs. This study aims at examining how Chigozie Obioma uses animals as symbols and the journey motif in *The Fishermen* and how they give meaning to the text. This study also examines the symbolic use of the journey motif in presenting content. Through this study, I therefore, seek to demonstrate how the meaning of *The Fishermen* is constructed through the use of the journey motif and animal symbols and images.

1.2 Objectives

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To examine the use of animal images and symbols in the text and understand how they advance the understanding of character relationships as well as the 1990s Nigerian political landscape as presented in *The Fishermen*.
- ii. To investigate the effectiveness of the journey motif as a literary style used in advancing thematic concerns in *The Fishermen*.

1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guide this research,

- i. Chigozie Obioma, in *The Fishermen*, employs the use of animal images and symbols to advance a deeper understanding of how characters relate as well as explaining the past history of post-colonial Nigeria.
- ii. The journey motif as stylistic devices used in *The Fishermen* helps in the deeper understanding of the history of postcolonial.

1.4 Justification

The choice of *The Fishermen* is preceded by the curiosity I have about the author's extensive use of animal images and animal symbols and journey motifs. Most reviews of *The Fishermen* dwell on the content rather than the form in the text yet the centrality of the ideas in the text and events revolves around the use of animal images and symbols and the journey motifs. Therefore, there is a need to give prominence to these animal images and symbols for a better understanding of not just the text or the language aesthetics but also the cultural and historical context in which the setting of the text is hinged upon.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study limits itself to the analysis of *The Fishermen* by Obioma, to interrogate how he use of animal imagery and animal symbols to understand the lived lives of the characters as well as how they relate in the text. Additionally, this study is also limited to analysing the journey motifs as a way of understanding the historical context of the text. This study also utilizes secondary materials to enrich the topic to its conclusion.

1.6 Literature review

This literature review focuses on works on imagery and symbolism and reviews done on Chigozie Obioma's novel *The Fishermen*.

1.6.1 This literature review focuses on works on imagery and symbolism

Edgar Roberts and Henry Jacobs in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* make a pertinent observation regarding literary symbols. They argue that while conducting a study on symbols, there is a need to test and judge whether the symbols, “consistently refers beyond itself to a significant idea, emotion or quality” (326) They define imagery as references “to words that trigger your imagination to recall and combine images-memories or mental pictures of sights, sounds, tastes, smell, sensations to touch and motions” (600). Images that actively engage the reader to experience a near real-life experience when reading a text. Through the act of bringing in the imagination of the reader’s minds’ to be able to make a connection between what they read and their real life experiences which acts as points of reference thereby invoking consciousness. Roberts and Jacobs's argument reveals two critical elements of understanding symbols; one is that symbols are consistently repeated to produce their intended meaning; secondly is that symbols carry a significant idea or emotion. This study focuses on images and symbols that are repeated and thus aim to understand what they suggest as far as ideas and moods are used to advance the plot and foreground themes Obioma deploys and the various systems of images captured in *The Fishermen*. The experiences of the reader are embedded through their own individualistic idea, or that of the communal understanding of life, nature, social, philosophical existence, etcetera. This study shows that images and symbols are culturally embedded or contextually embedded to produce the intended effect and one must thus understand the symbols and images as embedded just like in *The Fishermen*

Charles Chadwick while studying poetry, points out that symbols can be used to highlight issues a writer is concerned with. He argues that symbols do not denote to something literally but they refer to it in a deeper manner (3). He defines symbolism as “the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through obvious comparisons with concrete images but suggesting what ideas and emotions are, by recreating them in the

mind of the reader using unexplained symbols” (17). This study therefore, would be enriched by trying to understand the relationship between the characters and the animal images and symbols recreated through the characters by the narrator so as to better understand the text as well as understand its effective use in plot narration.

Hugh Dickson investigates various images and symbols that authors borrow from classical myths to enrich contemporary texts. Dickson argues that such “elements enrich the overall understanding of a text” (8). Dickson's argument is essential in this study in that the text under study borrows images and symbols from myths and other oral traditions to enrich issues under discourse. Isidore Okpewho shares a similar view with Dickson’s assertion when he comments that the artist leads the way in recreating some of the progressive forms of the common myths, which they can only achieve through their dynamic sense of form. By combining linguistics and literary elements, the artist gives meaning to the context of his daily life. It is thus by borrowing from the cultural template of symbols and images that this study will bring into focus the importance of the animal symbols and images employed by Obioma to enrich his style.

In *Contemporary Africa Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Florence Stratton investigates the use of known African myths by well-known African writers in their artistry. For instance, she points at how Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Elechi Amadi and Wole Soyinka employ myths that only serve to subdue women and endorse the “Manichean allegory of gender” (91). She, however, argues that women writers like Flora Nwapa employ myths in her writings to pursue an equal representation of women within a patriarchal society. Women writers used them to articulate a feminist agenda besides subverting negative portrayal by male writers. From Stratton's assertions, myths can be employed in modern novels to affirm the cultural legitimacy of women's power, which can then be interpreted with the modern world in mind. This study seeks to analyse how Obioma, unlike his predecessors moves from the Manichean allegory of gender through mythology, but he goes ahead to use animal images and

symbols not just to push the gender representations, but a journey of the characters and time to understand the social, political and economic issues that ravage contemporary Nigeria.

Gachanja Kiai in his unpublished MA thesis points out that the journey motif in a text is a common symbol mostly used in an attempt for a character mostly in “searching for an environment where justice, freedom and dignity are treasured” (44). He focuses on the physical journey in the Bessie head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather* and argues that the journey is enacted through imagery to symbolise a characters’ thoughts and different possibilities of becoming as a way of them discovering their purpose in life. This study develops further to argue that a journey is both a motif as well as a symbol that is used to promote the thematic concerns, growth of the characters and the plot in the text.

Okengo Matingi, in his M.A thesis, “Images of The African Women in Buchi Emecheta’s Fictional Works”, interrogates the images and representations of African women by Emecheta. He argues that the images of women depicted in Emecheta's texts are influenced by her experiences. His investigations led him to conclude that Emecheta depicts the image of an African woman as oppressed and struggling to ascertain herself within a male-dominated society. He also points out that the author uses characterisation, irony, images and symbolism to enrich her thematic concerns as well as successfully highlighting the plights of the African women and challenging patriarchy with the hope of bringing equality. My study aims to investigate animal imagery and animal symbolism in a male-authored novel *The Fishermen*. This study understands that there exists between writers a difference in experiences, in eras as well as cultural understandings thus making this study interesting and rich to study not just as a comparative one but to continue from the point of understanding more about African imagery and symbolism.

1.6.2 Reviews on Obioma's *The Fishermen*

In critiquing *The Fishermen*, Joseph Omotayo sets out to establish thematic concerns and the style employed within the text. He points out that the text is a tragedy and a sad family tale. He appreciates sharp and vivacious images the writer illuminates in the text that capture the readers' imagination and he approaches it through a feminist theoretical framework of understanding. He pursues to critique the text as offering a rich niche for a feminist reading owing to its frail representation of women. He asserts that "women characters in the text seem skewed and almost unintelligent" (Omotayo), an image which Obioma creates stereotypically to women, thus offering a good case for a feminist approach to the study of this text. Omotayo review focuses mainly on the content of the text, but he also discusses Obioma's use of style though not much attention is given to the images and symbols the author uses to enrich his content. This study specifically seeks to focus more on the animal imagery and animal symbolism the author uses in the text.

Antony Cummins in "*The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma review- A Deadly Serious School Boy Adventure" examines the novel as a tale, adventure riddled with images and metaphors. He points that the text exposes the soft underbelly of postcolonial Nigeria. He sees Nigeria as a forced marriage where numerous ethnic groups were forced to form a nation by colonial masters. The relationship is rife and doomed with conflicts and violence. He observes that the novel can be read as the breakdown of the Agwu family and as well as an everyday tale of adolescent life. Cummins further points that the text can also be viewed as a symbol of inter ethnic tension in Nigeria as a result of colonialism. Indeed, Cummins' review discusses the novel as a fable whose images and symbolism is represented through adventures. However, this study goes much further to specifically focus on animal imagery and symbols and how they are effectively used in the text to exposes various issues that challenges postcolonial Nigeria as well as analyse the language used together with the journey motif as one important style that

propagates the story into one complete text of identity formation of individuals, the family and the nation at large.

Meja Lang'o in "Depiction of Violence in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*" investigates intertextuality and its deployment in Obioma's novel in the depiction of violence. He examines the use of a family as a metonymy of the nation. He relies on oral tradition, biblical allusions and history to discuss the issue of violence. He comments that "Obioma exercises control over the novel and guides the reader on how the novel should be read... he does this by embedding on his work intertextuality devices that enhance the message of violence" (33). There is a need to focus on images and symbols the writer deploys to communicate his ideas. This study, therefore, examines images and symbols employed not just as a guide provided by the author but one that the author borrows from the traditional Igbo culture as well as from the passage of time which thus demands that the reader is attune to not just the cultural images and their meanings but also the historical context as well. This is thus what I aim to analyse how different images and symbols in the novel opens further understanding of the novel and not just as an interest to violence and its metaphorical representations.

Fiammetta Rocco in a newspaper review "*The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma" comments that "*The Fishermen* is a biblical parable set in the 1990s when Nigeria was under the military dictatorship of Gen. Sani Abacha"(1). She explores the thematic concerns in the text. According to Rocco, corruption and dystopia represented in the text have disillusioned the Nigerians stimulating the collapse of moral fabric. She views Obioma's political undertones in *The Fishermen* as an obvious, thought that is not overstated. "Countries can take a wrong turn as Obioma suggests, just as people can" (Rocco). She is apparent that the six decades of independence, that projects Nigeria as marred by lies, soothsayers and madmen and a bagful of troubles. Her study is an attempt to interpret allegories in the text. However, she does not examine the illuminating images and symbols that Obioma employs to enrich the content. This

study examines focuses on the study of Obioma's use of symbols and images for a better understanding of the text.

Tim Martin in “*The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma Review: ‘Full Force’” comments that *The Fishermen* is a jostling and colourful piece of work set in Nigeria during the military rule of the 1990s, which conceals a subtle state of nation allegory in its tale of an enlightened family driven to disintegration by a false prophecy. He further asserts that the text has a tinge of Shakespearean or Greek tragedy due to the fatal flaws, the father’s bold ambition of his children. He avers that there is a succinct postcolonial allegory as sprouting seeds of division and dissatisfactions begin to tear the family apart. His argument is supported by Tee Jay in a review article where he argues that Obioma draws Aristotelian conception of tragedy." Eme Agwu, the children's father is the tragic character, even though he is anything but a hero" he argues his hamartia is his authority to keep his children in check. His study focuses on the postcolonial allegory of the text and not the analysis of the images and animal symbols that the author deploys in the text. This study focuses on the images and animal symbols employed in the text to represent the contemporary issues affecting post-colonial Nigeria.

Hellon Habilla in a review of *The Fishermen* in The Guardian Newspaper asserts that Obioma like his predecessors Achebe and Ngugi infuses the traditional English novel form with the oral telling tradition hence dramatizing the conflict between traditional and modern. He also posits that the text is grounded in the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, which mostly goes: a good and noble-minded man shows hubris and is brought down by the gods for it. A statement Obioma embeds on the text when he quotes Igbo proverb. “Those the gods have chosen to destroy; they inflict with madness” (Obioma 128). Habilla also focuses on how Mr. Agwu dreams to be better than his neighbour's by siring six offspring and saying he wanted them to be doctors and engineers. Due to that hubris, the family’s struggle begins. He says, “the story is told in the narrative present as a recollection of past events by now an adult Ben. This well-managed

balance between childhood and action and adult memory gives the book a directness and guilelessness that is essential to its success. The mention of tragedy and myth in Morosetti's review is relevant in this study because Obioma infuses images and symbols from myths to drive his agenda. This study investigates the use of animal imagery and animal symbolism as aesthetic tools used to the present contemporary issues afflicting Nigeria as well as the development and understanding of the self, the family and the nation through the journeying motif.

1.7 Theoretical framework

Two theoretical frameworks guide this study: Postcolonial literary theory and Formalism. Charles Bressler defines postcolonial theories as; "a set of theories in philosophy and various methods to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were or still are colonies of other countries" (235). Neil Lazarus in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* points that the term 'postcolonial' was originally "a periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept" (2). Therefore, many scholars have taken it and theorized it differently. Postcolonial theory investigates what happens when two different cultures meet. The very first moment of colonial contact with the colonized, a seed and discourse of opposition to colonial discourses is empowered. Therefore, postcolonial theory deals with literary works depicting the effects of colonialism. *The Fishermen* is set in postcolonial Nigeria from 1993 to 2003, a decade that marks Nigeria's political, economic and social upheavals owing to military coups and military dictatorship. It mirrors the effects of the dysfunctional colonial system to African states. The text stocks many other contemporary novels that expose disappointments and disillusionments that encompass postcolonial African states. After African states' independence from colonial powers, they are experiencing new challenges of defragmentation centred on ethnicity and sectarian causing violence and civil wars. This study relies on the ideas of Postcolonial theorists such as; Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Achille Mbembe.

Homi Bhabha converted the study of colonialism by applying poststructuralist methodologies to colonial texts. The primary concern of Bhabha is the marginalisation of the colonised. Bhabha asserts that the domination of the colonised depends on the assertion of difference: the colonised are inferior to the coloniser. This ideology through mimicry finds root in ethnicity and tribalism in the African context. The other tenet of the post-colonial theory that will guide this study is cultural hybridity.

Peter Barry examines postcolonial in a situation where a person or a group of people belong to different cultures simultaneously. It is a characteristic of the post-colonial writing to focus on the mutuality between the oppressor and the oppressed. Bill Ashcroft argues that the transaction between the two is because the coloniser does not completely destroy the colonised. This means that hybridity does not mean that one culture leads to the disappearance of the other, but it is a continual process of mutual development of each other (184). He says that when two cultures interact, for example, that of the colonisers and the colonised, there is a possibility of an emergence of an in-between culture. This is what he refers to as hybridity. Bhabha points that the solution does not lie in the binary opposition as argued by Edward Said whose views locate division of coloniser and colonised between orient and occident, where occident represents civilisation and supremacy while orient is inferior and uncivilised. An idea he focuses further on east and west. Bhabha views the shift should be in the process of domination, which is made possible by language, which he refers to as “stereotypical discourse” (133). He further says that the dominant discourse is likely to estrange the basis of its authority. The result is that the less dominant culture ends up producing the mimic man. This study identifies the dominant discourse that is oppressive and the discourses that reflect empowerment and examine what the texts recommend as the middle discourse or hybridity where no discourse is superior to the other.

Gayatri Spivak locates her postcolonial methodology closely to Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction, she also closely draws her views from Marxists and feminists to question how the truth is constructed instead of finding its errors. She argues that postcolonial theory relies on examining the identity issues in context to broader issues relating to nationhood. Spivak lays a lot of emphasis on contradictory issues of identity and ethnicity as well as gender issues. In her book, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* she is interested in the idea of the subaltern. Subaltern stands for the downgraded and the oppressed who are in dire need of their voices heard. She points, "Deconstruction can only speak the language of the thing it criticises" (223). Her idea is anchored on that the west cannot speak for Africa, or speak for the colonised and the colonised have no voice to speak for themselves. Therefore, there is a need for a third party which, represents the voiceless, who are the side-lined in the society. Spivak further maintains that when the colonisers and the colonised merge, the marginalised always remain unrepresented. Spivak's argument is that if the subaltern is voiceless, there is a need somebody to come up and speak for them. Using Spivak tenets, the critic identifies the subaltern groups in the text and the characters that speak on behalf of the subaltern. Her argument will help this study locate who speaks for the subaltern in *The Fishermen*.

This study also uses Achille Mbembe tenets of Postcolonial theory, where he argues "the notion postcolonial identifies specifically a given history trajectory- that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonialization and the violence, which the colonial relationship involves" (102). Mbembe points out that postcolonial Africa has not entirely disentangled herself from oppressive chains of colonialism. Africa is still in the hegemonic imagination of poverty, rivalry and unending conflicts. He goes further to investigate post colonialism from a contemporary point of view. He argues that the power structures moved hands and are now in the hands of the local leaders. In the chapter, "Aesthetics of Vulgarly" Mbembe argues that the grotesque and obscene are elements that characterize and identify postcolonial regimes where

domination is complex. He draws his theorisation from Bakhtin's arguments on the obscene and grotesque. Mbembe subverts Bakhtin's ideas and introduces a new way of looking at the obscene and grotesque concerning the postcolonial situation. Mbembe theory will help trace and discuss the elements of the grotesque and obscene images in *The Fishermen*.

Another theoretical framework that has been used in this study is Formalism. Formalists argue that a text is self-reliant and has the capability to be understood on its own as a complete unit. Formalists are interested with the form of a literary text in order to locate the meaning. They focus on elements such as setting, characters, diction, plot, figurative language, point of view etc. According to Charles E Bressler, the Formalists believe that "text should be investigated as to its own discipline" (51). However, two schools emerge that address the autonomy of the text: Russian formalists and the New Criticism group. Russian formalism declares, "The proper study of literature is literature itself"(51). Therefore, this study is reliant on the formalists' chief focus of examination of a text's literariness and language. Formalists emphasize that literary language works at a heightened level which they refer as foregrounding. The language is foregrounded through use of various literary devices such as; imagery, symbols, overstatement, paradox, repetition etc. Therefore, in order to better decode the meaning of ta text, there is the need to analyze these literary devices. The main focus of formalists is to analyze the linguistic and structural features in the text.

This study uses the formalists' primary tenet of formalism which is the close textual reading. The study is also reliant with Shklovsky's argument that literary language works by defamiliarisation. This is the process of bringing into focus strange things into the familiar realm or putting old images in a new light. The estrangement "slows down the act of perceiving everyday words or objects forcing the listener or reader to re-examine the image" (52) thereby de-automatizes the images to be understood forcing the reader to think about what s/he would otherwise have automatically sensed or understood from his or her own experience. Therefore,

the two theories will form the pillars of discussions in this study to inform and reach the conclusions.

1.8 Methodology

My study begins with a close reading of the primary text *The Fishermen*, which will be analysed with the aim of identifying how imageries and animal symbols contribute to the understanding of the text. I examined the text using postcolonial theories and formalism. Postcolonial theories are essential in discussing some of the issues faced in post-colonial states and how Obioma employs images and animal symbols to discuss these issues. Formalism will assist in the close textual reading and analysing the style, structure, images and animal symbols that emerge from the text and how the author appropriates them to advance his plot.

CHAPTER TWO

A CRITIQUE OF POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how Obioma in *The Fishermen*, deploys animal imagery and symbols to advance themes. In this chapter, I first present the synopsis of the novel. This then paves way for an exploration of various recurrent images and animal symbols deployed, their significance and functions based within the fictional setting in the text as well as the cultural fabric of the Igbo and Yoruba cultures in which the text is contextualized as well as the representation of the modern Nigeria. I will use aspects of formalism and postcolonial theories to advance my arguments.

2.1 Synopsis of *The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma

The Fishermen, is a story told by Thirty-nine-year-old, Ben tells a tragic story of his childhood. Ben was nine when his father was abruptly, transferred to work in Yola, a distant town. This distance makes it hard for him to come home daily or often as he would like.

Their father is the strict disciplinarian of the family, so with him out of town, Ben and his older brothers, Ikenna, Boja, and Obembe try out new things instead of studying as their father expects them to do. He wants them all to have a good education and had even plots professional careers for them. While their mother is busy taking care of her shop, the home and the two youngest children, they play football and other games in the streets for a while, but soon decide to go fishing in the Omi-Ala River.

The villagers have a negative view of this river and all have been discouraged to go near it. In fact, there is even a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. curfew at the river to keep people from going there after dark. The river was once the cultural center of the community and shrines were built in its honor. However, with the spread of Christianity, the shrines and the river were regarded as evil

places. In recent times, many murders and other evil deeds have occurred there. The boys know the negative view of the river but they decide to go there, anyway.

One of the characters who frequents there is Abulu, who is half mad and half prophet. Abulu has been known to give accurate and unsolicited prophesies to people. Although he has often used his vision to help the police solve a number of crimes, the villagers do not particularly like his unsolicited prophesies. One day, Abulu runs across Ben and his brothers one day and tells the oldest, Ikenna that he will die at the hands of a fisherman.

The madman's words drive Ikenna crazy. He becomes suspicious of everyone, especially his brothers, because, after all, they are fishermen. Ikenna changes from a happy, active, high-spirited young man to a recluse, harsh and cruel one, especially to his brothers, and more so, Boja. Before long, a wedge of hatred separates the two. One day, Ikenna and Boja get into a nasty fight, while Ben and Obembe. As the fight gets nasty, Ben and Obembe get scared and ran to find an adult to intervene. When they come back with a neighbor, Mr. Bode, they find Ikenna dead, in the kitchen, with a stab wound and Boja, nowhere to be seen. A few days later, Boja is found dead, floating in the well in the homestead.

Naturally, the family was shaken by the double tragedy. Ironically, Ikenna, the one who created the hatred between him and his brother by his actions, is given a proper burial while Boja, is cremated according to tribal laws because he commits a taboo by killing and also taking his own life. Ben is sad about this, but Obembe takes this more seriously. At 11 years old, he sets out to kill the madman who changed his family forever. He begins to carefully devise various plans of how to kill Abulu. Ben, after hearing his mother talk about how Abulu had torn their family apart, decides to join Obembe in his mission.

However, the longer the boys take to kill Abulu, the less interested Ben becomes in carrying through the plan. He thinks of backing out but fearful of losing his brother's love and respect, he decides to complete the mission. One day, they go to the river, attack Abulu while

he was sleeping under a tree and beat him up with barbed rods, ripping chunks of his flesh, causing him much bleeding. The man falls into the river and dies.

Their mother is elated when she hears the news of Abulu's death. On realizing that they are key suspects of the murder, Obembe convinces Ben to run away. After hours on the run, Ben decides to turn around and go back home to face the consequences. Obembe decides to continue running away forward, but vows to write to his brother.

The next morning, the police arrest Ben. Before his trial began, their father admits to Ben that he too had tried to kill Abulu. He reassures Ben that that killing the man was a good thing. Ben is accused of manslaughter and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. He stays in jail for six years with visits, only, from a prison priest. Due to a change in government policy, Ben is released from prison. He is sixteen years at this time.

The story ends with Ben's return home. He realizes that with the absence of his three elder brothers, he is now big brother to his brother David and sister, Nkem. It is not clear what happens to Obembe.

2.2 Tragedy and the Modern African Prose Fiction

Writers have often used family tragedies as a model to discuss issues afflicting society. Justin Kaplan in *The Pocket Aristotle* notes that the family, from classical time, serves as the first locale for the most serious tragedies. He observes that family tragedies, elicit more emotions in audiences and readers than tragedies narrated outside of the family. For example, most tragedies written by Sophocles and Shakespeare, two prolific writers of tragedy, centre their stories on families. Flaws in character, especially excessive pride and anger, bring about the downfall of characters. This affects not just the individual but also others in the family and even outside it. Some contemporary African writers have also created their stories around family tragedies. For example, Francis Imbuga's play *Betrayal in the City* enacts the death of Adika, a university student shot during demonstrations. Jusper, his brother, goes back to the village to avenge his

death. He kills Chagaga the chief's brother who is suspected to have killed Adika. The play relies on a family tragedy to depict a country torn between ethnicity, nepotism and dictatorship amongst many other themes. Also, most of John Ruganda's plays are embellished with tragedies to explore Ugandan social, political and economic issues. Other examples of works by African writers that centre on tragedies in families include: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, Reading these works one easily notes the extent to which characters' actions, based on their flawed character, creates challenges for themselves and others.

This study is cognizant of two levels the text operates from. This is from a literal level as well as a symbolic one. At the literal level, family, but more importantly, sibling relationships are at the heart of this story. It is quite heart-warming to encounter brothers who love each deeply. Ben, for example, idolises his older brothers, Ikenna and Boja, and believes everything they say, simply because they are older than him. It is also touching to see how they innocently and free-spiritedly, engage in all manner of escapades. It is rather saddening to see the tragic and gradual disintegration of a family, with the influence of the supernatural playing a great part in this disintegration. A reading of the text, clearly shows that the writer is engaged in telling much more than the story of a family disintegration. This is more so, when he entitles chapters with names of animals and goes ahead to present the significance of the animals. This is the sole interest of this chapter.

Obioma's use of animal imagery and symbolism can be seen in his use of domesticated animals, wild animals, birds, and fish to advance, to foreground, and to capture the readers' imagination. They become allegorical tools employed to critique and highlight issues that affect post-colonial Nigeria.

2.3 Situating Ethnic Animal Symbol within Post-Colonial Nigeria

Emmanuel Obiechina in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West Africa Novel* notes that West African writers draw from Western African folklore, traditional symbols and images, and traditional speeches to blend their writing in Western African flavour. He argues that oral tradition in West Africa survived even after the introduction of writing by colonialists. Obioma, like his predecessors in West African literature draws much of the animal symbols and images he uses from Igbo oral tradition. On the other hand, Gladys Ifeoma Udechukwu argues in “The Significance and Use of Cultural Symbol in the Contemporary African Society: Igbo Symbols as A Paradigm”, that it is generally believed that there is an erosion of cultural values especially in those that constitute a veritable source of human existence in the past be it in form of religious practise, memories or imaginations amongst the Igbo (111). She categories African / Igbo symbols as: animal, ritual symbols, number symbols, ritual symbols, royal symbols, ancestral symbols, cultural symbols, diagrammatical symbols and gestural symbols. She concludes that symbols within the African/Igbo setting are “powerful instruments of indoctrination to maintain order.... that of communication... of their feelings, thoughts and experiences...transmit some basic ideas and principles of our inner selves...preserve knowledge, historical and religious occurrences....as well as valuable means of passing on the culture of a people from one generation to another” (115). It is against this background that we will study *The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma.

One animal used to develop idea in the novel is the eagle. The narrator foregrounds the father’s character at the beginning of the text in the third chapter by giving it the title of an eagle. An eagle is known as the king of the birds, a bird that flies above and far beyond where other birds dare not fly. As the man of his family, he rules it with an iron fist. However, he is presented as a visionary man; The narrator says that “father was not the kind of man who would dip his foot on another person’s shoes because his own was damp. ... he would rather trek the earth bare feet....” (27). This presents the father as a go getter. A man who has a vision for his family,

especially his sons. As keenly as an eagle watches out from the sky to get the best meals, so does the father watch over his children to get the best for them. Father always had a plan for his sons: He hopes that Ikenna will become a doctor (but later changed to pilot when Ikenna expressed more interest in that career); Boja, a lawyer; Ben, a professor (even though he wanted to be a veterinarian); and Obembe, a doctor. The juxtaposition of the father as an eagle, a bird of prey that can fly on hours without touching the ground and him trekking the earth bare feet depicts a man who stands for courage, strength, confidence, power and leadership. The eagle as a leader is depicted as an embodiment of the sky god, one all seeing, and one that signifies inspiration, longevity, victory and speed. It is only after fathers' moves that the narrator confesses that, "Time and seasons and the past began to matter" different from their perception of time as a blank canvass on which anything could be imagined" (11). The absence of the father who constantly watches over his family like an eagle, heralds the family disintegration.

Just like the eagle that teaches its chicks how to fly, by taking them high into the clouds and dropping them only to catch them, the father's move to Yola, is as if he is an eagle that takes the eaglets up, through his visionary and highly disciplinarian directions as a father. Later on he would drop them (the children), unsupported, from the sky. However, instead of them flapping their wings and flying to maturity and independence, they end up flapping their wings to their deaths. It is no wonder that the father teaches his sons early how to live and survive on their own. On the day of his transfer, he holds a discussion with his wife and this Ben narrates "From that Friday through that Saturday, Father and Mother held whispering consultations like shrine priests. By Sunday morning Mother emerged a different being. She'd acquired the gait of a wet mouse, averting her eyes as she went about the house" (11). The animal imagery illuminated in this excerpt draws a helpless woman who is wondering what would happen to her family. As a mother and wife, her worry is how she would survive without the man she is married to and how to bring up her children as well as how they would cope in absentia of their

father. The narrator uses a simile to describe the mother's frustration and resignation to her fate. The narrator describes the mother walking as a "wet mouse" to show her defeat to fate, where she would have to raise her kids by herself. It is this helplessness that makes her lament saying, "What kind of job takes a man away from bringing up his growing sons? Even if I were born with seven hands, how would I be able to care for these children alone?" (9). It is this sense of powerlessness that the children feel exposed and worried about their father which is shouldered by their mother.

To cement the power of the father in the family, the eagle is a totem animal that depicts ambition, toughness, patience as well as wisdom. The narrator says,

Father was an eagle: The mighty bird that planted his nest high above the rest of his peers, hovering and watching over his young eagles, the way a king guard his throne. Our home the three-bedroom bungalow he bought the year Ikenna was born was his cupped eyrie; a place he ruled with a clenched fist. (41)

It is the societal role of a father to rule his family and lead them to prosperity. Within the patriarchal Yoruba and Igbo societies, it is the man who is the leader of the family, even though they have a saying that "Mother is Supreme". The eagle has talons used for defence against predators and attacking its prey. The unification of a struggle and unity is one embedded against good and evil, light versus darkness. As a role model to be emulated and as a ruler, the eagle is considered ruthless and it is depicted so in the number of times Ben and his siblings have been beaten and the number of times their mother was hit. It is until Ben bit his fathers' finger when involved in a fight with his mother that we are able to realize the excesses of father's tyrannical rule mated on his family. As far as punishment is concerned, the excess of father's hand is beyond measure. This is demonstrated when Ben says "although we knew from the beginning that fishing was nowhere on Father's list, we did not think of it at the time. It became a concern from that night when Mother threatened to tell father about our fishing, thereby kindling the

fire of fear of father's wrath in us" (42). The children's fear of their father takes the image of fire: a fire that consumes the love and respect of a father. By and large, this fire can be equated to the Oedipal Complex of fear that exists between a son and a father, where there is competition for love and affection from the mother as well as the penis envy- which can be understood as power. In carrying out his punishment, father is merciless, ruthless and violent to the young men, hence their quest to rebel and seek freedom. In places where fear of violence and oppression is prevalent individuals always revolt in search for freedom. The cruelty the father levels against his family devastates the family's psychological and physical wellbeing. It is in the same light that we can thus reflect the tyrannical rule of the father with the suffering of the Citizens as a nation- state-family paralleling the dictatorial regime that ruled Nigeria in the 1990s by Sani Abacha. This is what happens when the father is posted away from the home. The children get an opportunity to explore the outside world. It is while adventuring at Omi-Ala that they come across a soothsayer (Abulu) who casts a prophecy that ignites a family feud between Boja and Ikenna and at long last leads to a family tragedy when Boja kills his older brother Ikenna and he, himself commits suicide.

Amadu Sesay and Ukeje (1997) point out that Abacha in November 1993 overthrew a transitional government that was constituted after post-election violence broke out when Abiola was denied the presidency by the incumbent military leader Babangida, on allegations that the election was unfair. Obioma uses Ben's vivid description of his father to paint an image of a strong and strange man. The image the author uses here represents a man who is ruthless and bitter not only to his family but even to his neighbours. The author equates the father to Abacha when he tortures his children, thrashing them and denying them the freedom to interact with their neighbours. Ben says, "father was not the kind of man who would dip his foot in another shoe because his own was damp; he would rather trek the earth on bare feet" (43). The narrator is aware of the father's pride and arrogance to instill fear in the family. The father is equated to

an eagle that uses its strength to guard and protect its territory. He protects his children from outside influence. He only wishes his children to pursue 'Western education' and become different from their neighbours' children. The desire of the father for his children to acquire Western education portrays him as a 'modern man'. However, he is also portrayed as brainwashed by colonization. He alienates his cultural background and depicts cultural subjugation caused by colonialism to African cultures. Just like the colonialists, the father uses terror, fear and hatred to oppress and guard his children against external influences. Ironically, after he is transferred, the family starts falling apart. The departure of the father from the family provides an opportunity for the oppressed children to stand up and resist the father's domination.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind* argues that imperialists continue to assert themselves in postcolonial African states, hence controlling economy, politics, and culture indirectly. However, he argues that the Africans' struggle for self-determination and self-regulation is a continuous battle. Ngugi feels that the independence of African states from the colonialist did not grant them absolute freedom but rather there was a change in the face of control from the colonialists to African puppets who are considered as the elites. It is these elites who ensure that the colonial power is still operational within the postcolonial states through cultural influence, education, politics, language use and the control of the economy. Father is a modern and educated man. His use of the English language to communicate with his children and wife is evidence of such. He has a three-bedroomed bungalow thus positioning him amidst the middle class. This is depicted when he refuses his children to interact with his neighbours not to learn about their own culture. His desire for the children to acquire "western education" is insatiable since his dream of his children is that Ikenna should be a pilot, Boja a lawyer, Obembe a family medical doctor, David their younger brother an engineer whilst Nkem their youngest sibling who was a girl was not thought of. This, thus, depicts the patriarchal

socialisation that he has, only thinking of the male children and not trying to think the same for his daughter. This may seem a paradox that even though he seems alienated from his culture and obsessed with colonialists' culture, he holds on to the patriarchal tenets that ascribe the disinterest of the father towards the girl child affairs.

The Fishermen reflects on the effects of colonialism. Obioma uses the home space as a microcosm of the nation to represent the challenges that arise from (in) direct colonialism. Through the father's symbol of an eagle, he satirizes ethnicity, tribalism and violence in postcolonial Nigeria. The author exaggerates the father's powers to mock the excesses of a dictator. Agwu is portrayed as a dictator who is not persuaded even by his obsession with western culture. He ignores his wife, threatens her and does whatever he wishes or feels befits the family. In this depiction, the author mocks the Nigerian dictators. The father's use of violence does not hinder the boys' search for truth. At first, their innocence denies them the power to break from their father's oppression

Other animal imageries that have been used are those of the python and the sparrow. According to Ajibade George Olusola in *Folklore interrogating "Animals in the Traditional Worldview of the Yoruba"* it should be noted that amongst the Yoruba there exist many taboos and myths about animals and human beings, especially in their interactions with human beings (157). The relationship between animals and humans has led to a classification of animals according to their groups, habitat, nature, where domesticated or wild and their physiognomy (156) which has at times led to animals being seen as equal to human beings (159). It is thus prudent to understand why the author draws an image of both a python and a sparrow to depict Ikenna.

The narrator says:

Ikenna was a python: a wild snake that became a monstrous serpent living on trees, on plains above other snakes. Ikenna turned into a python after the whipping. It changed him. The Ikenna I knew became a different one: mercurial and hot-tempered person

constantly on the prowl. This transformation had started much earlier, gradually, internally, long before the whipping (63).

A python, according to Olusola, is the king of the reptiles. The image of the python living on trees, on plains above other snakes depicts a hierarchical existence between Ikenna- the python as a leader and the other snakes – his siblings. This image of hierarchy amongst siblings is depicted through the order of birth and the responsibilities he is bestowed on in the family as well as his development as a young man. However, this image of the python additionally gives us the character of Ikenna as disrespectful, just as snakes hiss, Ikenna the python also hisses at his own mother. The narrator says, “Ikenna threw off his shirt and hissed in reply. I was stupefied. Hissing at an older person in Igbo culture was considered an insufferable act of insubordination” (48). This act of insubordination is disrespectful to a mature person not just in Igbo culture alone but to the African cosmology. In most African societies, the Igbo notion about a mother being supreme, holds. Therefore, by hissing at one’s own mother, transposes Ikenna’s human qualities of a child, who ideally should know how to behave towards his mother, to that of a snake, which is a cursed animal. This additionally, reinforces the aggression that emanates from Ikenna as a snake and that of the original sin of disobedience when the snake made the woman disobey God. It is this image that, therefore, projects an omen of death and a curse in the family, which in turn acts as a foreshadow of what the mad man professes even before getting to the prophecy. Ikenna thus becomes like a dangerous wild snake that takes advantage of its size to oppress other smaller snakes. The narrator draws a thin line between Ikenna and his Father. However, he narrates the journey of Ikenna’s transformation. Ikenna’s transformation is expressed as a genesis of violence he begets from his father. He becomes hot-tempered, unpredictable and scavenger. This image deepens the drift within the family.

The image of Ikenna as a python emphasizes his power as the firstborn. A python though not one that spews poison is a dangerous reptile; one at that it crushes its prey by breaking its bone and asphyxiating its prey in a slow death. Ikenna's power just like that of the python is used to suffocate, suppress and oppress his subjects, brothers and friends alike. Like a python, he is ready to squeeze, crush and swallow his enemies. The author depicts Ikenna as arrogant and controlling his brothers and expects them to obey him without asking him any questions.

Symbolically, this rift between brothers represents the tribal cracks amongst the Nigeria tribes. The disagreements amongst tribes heighten to polarize the nation. The author foregrounds this in the text through a political contest between Abiola and Babangida.

So we crossed to the other side, a major commercial lane, filled with shops that were all crossed. The door of one of them was shattered, pieces of broken wood, fecund with nails dangled dangerously from the broken door ... we crossed the dump into a street where we saw a house in flames. The corpse of a man lay on its veranda. Ikenna ducked behind the burning house and we followed, trembling (170).

This happens after Nigeria's presidential election in 1993. The result is violence, bloodbath, and underdevelopment of the nation. The author draws the reader to visualize the African leaders who took power from the colonialists after independence. These leaders applied tyrannical methods to rule their subjects. The rule was that of crashing political opponents, killing democracy, swallowing the whole country's fund and being corrupt. Therefore, the python satirizes the African leaders who entertain tribalism and corruption that disillusion most of the African states.

With Ikenna portrayed as a wild monstrous snake that asserts its power over other snakes, the author foregrounds Nigeria as a nation torn by ethnicity, tribalism, mistrust and violence. The first son (Ikenna) is expected to guide his siblings; ironically, he withdraws from them and

creates a barrier between them. Just like a snake, which lives in seclusion and never in a nest, Ikenna leaves secluded from his brothers and mother and lives holed up in his room. He does not grant access to his younger brothers. Ikenna's perception towards his brothers is demeaning and creates a crack between the brothers. He takes himself as the only voice that can be heard amongst them. The image the writer creates of Ikenna satirizes African leaders, their hardness and failure to listen to their subjects negating the principles of good leadership. Obioma creates a sense of familial and tribal violence to create mental images in the reader's mind. It highlights the seriousness of the violence and hatred that exist between various tribes in Nigeria. The brothers punched each other with fierceness much greater than to an outsider. It also portrays the hatred as even skin deep and cannot be clipped without looking at historical causes. The history of the Nigerian nation like most post-colonial African states is its emergence from violent colonial rule. The divide and rule policy ingrained by colonialists to rule African demented its culture and created hostility amongst different ethnic groups.

Although Ikenna held Obembe and Benjamin in disrespect, he had mutual respect for Boja as the writer states, "Ikenna never dismissed Boja's idea without giving them proper thought. They had mutual respect for each other" (65). The mutual relationship is put to test by the mad man's prophecy and it fails the test. Despite their close relationship, Ikenna's superstitious belief that one of his brothers will kill him pushes him further to become a python. His poisonous pangs take root after Mama Iyabo reports them to their mother. He organizes revenge. The violent revenge of severing Mama Iyabo's rooster's head foreshadows the violent fight between Ikenna and Boja that leads to their death.

However, Ikenna's symbol of a python is deconstructed when Obioma later paints him in an image of a sparrow. The narrator writes, "Ikenna was a sparrow: a thing with wings, able to fly out of sight in the blink of an eye. His life had already gone by the time Obembe and I returned to our compound with Mr. Bode, and what we found on the floor in a pool of blood was his

empty blooded and mangle body” (204). Obioma alludes to the biblical representation of sparrow as a disturbing and faintly bird that is worthless. In the book of Mathew, it reads: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Mathew 10:29-31). The image of a sparrow in this context reveals the importance of man before God is more valuable than two worthless sparrows. The image of sparrow reinforces the weakness and vulnerability that overshadows Ikenna over his brothers. The distance he creates between his brothers makes him worthless in the family and a burden too. This image is reinforced after Ikenna’s death, he becomes a worthless person and the beginning of the family’s unhappiness. The image of Ikenna as a sparrow, therefore, symbolises the onset of a difficult time in the family. Ikenna’s death resulted in Boja committing suicide by jumping into a borehole in their compound. His death also resulted in his father resigning from his job and the onset of the mother’s psychological problem. The narrator writes “father knew too, for he returned two days after Ikenna died. It was drizzling, wet and slightly cold” (205). The narrator describes the return of the father in a grim image that is sad. This symbol cements the image of Ikenna as a sparrow, that after causing a lot of trouble in the family he turns it to be mournful.

The author uses the symbol of roosters to reinforce the characters of Obembe and Benjamin. This symbol indicates the physical and psychological efforts that Ben and Obembe put in place to avenge their brother’s death against Abulu. However, to achieve it they undergo various hardships. The image of a rooster arouses the reader’s imagination by creating a mental image. A rooster is always set to fight a cock, the fight is always tough as it may lead to the rooster’s death or he becomes the new head in the flock. The two boys take a risk to fight and kill the ‘ghost-like’ Abulu. They forge various plans discreetly to end Abulu’s oppression and domination in Akure, where he causes residents tribulations through his ‘dark prophecies’.

However, the military and police go after Obembe and Ben when they discover it was Obembe and Ben who killed Abulu. Obembe escapes to Benin while Benjamin is arrested, prosecuted and jailed for eight years. This incident complicates the family troubles further.

In their representation as roosters, Obembe and Ben are symbolic pillars of dedication to awaken the people against oppression and domination. Roosters as birds like to strut and be in the centre of attention, they are outspoken. Their revenge for the death of their brother Ikenna portrays this loyalty. The rooster symbolizes the voice of the oppressed. Spivak points that, in an oppressed society there is a need for a voice to speak for the oppressed (133). In Spivak's views, we can say Obembe and Ben represent the voice of the oppressed masses in Nigeria. The oppression comes in terms of their father's domination and Ikenna and Boja's domination against them. The domination also symbolises the domination of major tribes against smaller tribes in Nigeria. The author foregrounds the need for the small tribes to rise against domination to protect the Nigerian nation. Moreover, it also points out the price of their campaigning against oppression and regaining their identity is not smooth and it is dangerous. Their tribulations are to awaken others to see and fight for their rights and fight against ills in the postcolonial states.

David and Nkem are depicted in an image of Egrets in the text, "David and Nkem were egrets: the wool-white birds that appear in flocks after a storm, their wings unspotted, and their lives unscathed" (394). The Egrets are likened to wool white birds, the peace and freedom of the future generations when the ills affecting society are dealt with. The author uses them as symbols of hope in a country ravaged by disillusionment. David and Nkem represent the freedom experienced by future Nigerians if the people wake up against poor leadership and dictatorship which has ruined the economy of the country. The image of egret also symbolises the minority tribes in Nigeria. They have been silently watching the contentions between the majority tribes as they destroy the country. The writer projects that if Nigeria as a nation must

stand up against the grains of ethnicity and tribalism the only hope lies within the minority tribes taking over the governance. The image of the storm, which presents the death of Ikenna and Boja and predicaments of Obembe and Benjamin, is subverted and a new dawn of hope for David and Nkem revealed. Nkem and David are symbols of new postcolonial states that have realized their mistakes and subverted their misdeed to opportunities.

The author uses symbol and image of locusts to articulate various issues in the text. This is enumerated as the narrator writes “The people of Akure often rejoiced at arrival of the locusts. For, rained healed the land after the dry season during which the inclement sun, aided by the Harmattan wind, tormented the land” (282). The locusts draw the reader’s attention to the joys and the pain that arrives with locusts. The locusts foreground the much-awaited rainfall by the residents. However, its onset also points to the destruction of houses and the land. “The people would gather and feast on the roasted remains of the locusts, rejoicing at the oncoming of rain. But the rain would come down usually on the day after the locust invasion-with violent storm, plucking out roofs, destroying houses, drowning many and turning whole cities into strange rivers” (182 – 183). Therefore, the symbol of locusts is used to highlight the joy and strife. Joy, because they are a source of food, high in protein and are challenges because they are destructive to crops in the field.

The hostility between Ikenna and Boja is equated to an image of locusts. The author foregrounds this when the four brothers join Akure residents and other Nigerians to celebrate the Olympic finals. The night is presented as joyous where the tension between Ikenna and Boja is shed off and celebrate the national team together. However, the joy is short-lived, the next morning Ikenna and Boja engage in a fatal fight. Boja kills his brother Ikenna and disappears leaving the whole family mourning. Although, the symbol and the image of locusts are used to describe the literal tragedy of Ikenna and Boja, it also symbolises the volatility of Nigerian society. This is crystallised when the narrator points to the pride of the whole country during the 1993

Olympic Games when Nigeria's national soccer team reached football finals. The whole country sheds off its tribal disposition and celebrates as one nation. However, the celebrations are short-lived; violence broke loose after the 1993 elections causing deaths and destruction of properties. Although the electioneering period in the text is presented as the happiest moment; people campaigned freely and rejoiced around their candidates. At that moment there is unity and the country progresses positively. This is marked when Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Ben join the rest of Akure to sing for M.K.O a praise song. The country is presented in a jovial mood during the presidential campaign. However, after the elections, violence breaks out. There is murder, destruction of properties and fear all over the country. The joy and jubilations of the Olympic games are wiped out and ethnic hatred entrenched.

Locusts also evoke sight of the impending tragedy of sibling rivalry between Boja and Ikenna. The two brothers are depicted as “locusts” before the start of quarrels, their parents held hope and dreams for each of them. Despite the biting economy in the 1990s in Nigeria, the father had sketchy imaginations of his children; “Ikenna was to be a doctor or a pilot, Boja was to be a lawyer, Obembe was to be a family doctor and Benjamin was to be a professor, David was to be an engineer and Nkem had not been chosen for a career” (12).

The symbol of locusts also represents the disputed 1993 General election between M.K.O Abiola and Sani Abacha which ended in a bloodbath across the country. The election, like the locust, caused destruction and a deep wound of ethnic violence across the country. This is also foregrounded in the description of Olympic football finals between Nigeria and Argentina that brought unprecedented ‘ceasefire’ between Boja and Ikenna. It brought them together at a local club where they watched the game together. The calmness was short-lived- the following day a fierce fight erupted and led to their death.

They fought on with fierceness uncommon when boys of that age engage their siblings in a fight. Ikenna punched with a zeal that was far greater than he’d punched the chicken

selling boy at the Isolo market who called Mother an *ashewo*-whore when she refused to buy his chicken one Yuletide season (195-96).

The vivid description of Boja and Ikenna's fight draws an image of hatred that exists between the two brothers. The juxtaposition of their fierce fighting with Ikenna's punch to chicken selling boy at the Isolo market- arouses the reader's imagination to see the deep-rooted hatred between the two brothers which symbolises the ethnic hatred experienced in Nigeria. The hatred is depicted as the core cause of dystopia in most postcolonial states. The disillusionment and other ills emanate from tribal animosity. The source of this hatred is pointed to the colonialism and the way it disordered tradition and culture in Africa.

Ben is presented in a symbol of a Moth. The moth flies towards the light, destroys its wings and falls down to death. "...but when Obembe ran away, I fell like a moth whose wings were plucked off its body while in flight and became a being that could no longer fly but crawl" (380). The reliance of Ben on Obembe is equated to that of a moth and its wings. Obembe's departure renders Ben vulnerable and exposed to danger. This symbolizes the need and reliance between various tribes for the nation to function. The fragmentation of Agwu's children causes unbearable pain to the family. The image of a moth symbolizes the vulnerability that is experienced by people who are the voice for the voiceless. Ben and Obembe are presented as the voice for the oppressed mass. Obembe and Ben play a vital role to wake up the family and expose Abulu's prophecy as the cause of the family tragedy. The symbol of the moth informs the reader about the dedication and awareness Ben held for his acts. The consciousness of his action also presents the need of the masses to break from the norm and put themselves at the front in fighting the impunity. The image of a moth illuminates the voice of the oppressed.

The Mother is depicted in an image of a 'wet mouse'. The mouse symbolizes oppression against women by men and their lack of voice in matters of family. As a mouse, the mother must be aware of 'the cat' (the father) in the house in order to survive. This reinforces the prejudicial

treatment of women by society. Feminist reading on African literature has revealed the stereotyping of women in gendered oppression. Ciarunji Chesaina (1994) on her reading of *Maasai and Kalenjin oral literature* notes that women are depicted as voiceless and oppressed by men:

The images that come through are those of women as voiceless individuals who have little intelligence and therefore have to be totally dependent on men. They are portrayed as careless, vain, and idle beings who cannot be relied upon for seriousness in handling life experiences (87).

The novelist is a creative writer who chooses the novel genre for his literary creation. His “environment” refers to the general locale or the scene in which the actions in his work occur (Ikwubuzo 2012: 147). He continues to say that in “Family and the Igbo Novel” that the environment, “refers to traditional Igbo society and the prevailing social and cultural circumstances that they have shaped the novelist views. The socio-cultural environment in which the literary artist lived, his religious beliefs, political situations, historical incidents, and other experiences of human life that have affected him, are often re-enacted or alluded to in shaping his literature” (148). With the understanding that Formalists engage with the text to fully understand the context in which the writer creates the art together with the in-text, then it would be prudent to understand that even though such is the case, the writer too does input their understanding of the context to the life of the novel. It is this case that the writer through the narrator displays Igbo traditional patriarchal society where women are required to be submissive and even play the second fiddle to their husbands. Ironically, the imagery of a mother or a woman widely in Africa is mostly associated with the symbol of greatness, procreation and thus the inference of a nation. The trope of a nation as involving specific notions of womanhood and manhood and masculinity and femininity in a way of determining gender roles as pointed out by Nira Yuval-Davis in *Gender and Nation*. She states:

It is this fashioning of the address of the nationalist or masculinist bias in gendering the nation wherein women and women's roles are relegated to the periphery when she strongly says it is, women who reproduce nations biologically, culturally and symbolically and they are hidden in the various theorization of nationalist phenomena (2).

It is thus this image of a mother as a wet mouse that projects the image of a cowardly, cowering woman. A cowering wet mouse, according to Yuval- Davis, puts women at the periphery of many African nations. However, the breeding nature of the mouse, ironically, positions the woman as a key individual within the nation, since she is a central reproductive powerhouse. Even highly patriarchal societies recognize this fact of life. A threat to the mother is a threat to the nation and children should protect her with agility. Ironically in the text, the older children play a role to reinforce and cause dilemma to the mother.

The depiction of the mother as naïve as 'mouse' is a symbol of a disillusioned postcolonial state. The disillusionment is caused by bad leadership and violence pitching various major tribes in the contest of power. The father's heavy hand on the mother symbolizes how bad leadership disillusioned Nigeria. Obioma castigates the bad governances by African leaders who took the mantle from colonial masters. In the text, he equates the father's dictatorship to Sani Abacha's leadership in the 1990s. The father's arrogance is not only to his wife but extended even to his children and neighbours. "... Father was not the kind of man who would dip his foot in another shoe because his own was damp; he would rather trek the earth on bare feet" (43). The pride of the father symbolizes an African dictatorial ruler, his arrogance exemplifies the greed of power and money. Instead of developing the country, the African dictatorial rulers plunge the country into total disillusionment.

The father in the text can be taken to symbolize Sani Abacha the dictator in the 1990s, while mother in this context symbolizes Nigeria as a country. The mistreatment of the mother highlights the evils Abacha carried upon Nigeria. The four children can be viewed as symbols

of the four major Nigerian tribes: Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. Ngugi in *Writers in Politics* argues:

Literature is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality. As part of man's artistic activities, it is in itself part of man's self-realization as a result of his, wrestling with nature; it is, if you like, itself a symbol of man's creativity, of man's historical process of being and becoming (6).

Ngugi observes that literature is a reflection of the realities in society through the eyes of the artist. Therefore, the writer aims to expose his/her society in order to amend the flaws. Obioma reflects on the historical events and foregrounds them in a package of images and symbols. The images and symbol are cemented in *The Fishermen* to expose the high-handedness of the father, does not curtail his children's behaviour. In fact, it reinforces their desire for freedom. This can be seen after the cruel beating of the four boys by their father. This culminated after they were reported by mama Iyabo to their mother. The father's beating arouses the four boys' curiosity and they plan to avenge themselves against Mama Iyabo the woman who reported their expeditions on river Omi-Ala. They sneak into mama Iyabo's compound, steal one of her cocks, dismember its head, and throw it back into her compound. Although this scene foreshadows the impending tragedy between Ikenna and Boja, it also symbolizes the feeling of revenge by the oppressed people. It is as earlier stated about the nature of roosters to be outspoken, talkative that they wish for the death of Mama Iyabo for telling on them about their escapades at the river. As a form of displacement, the children act out their anger on the cock rather than Mama Iyabo whom they respect as an adult. In the same vein tyrants use the same tactic to hurt those in power they can't touch, therefore they displace their anger to similarities or "owned" similar traits like tribe, region et cetera to hurt them.

In *The Fishermen*, Boja is presented in an image of the Fungus, the narrator writes "Boja was a fungus; his body was filled with fungi. His heart pumped blood filled with fungi. His tongue was infected with fungi, and perhaps, so were most organs of his body" (219). The English

dictionary defines fungus as a type of living thing that digest food externally and uses its cells to absorb nutrients. Boja as a fungus is lethal as he slowly consumes others through infection. He, like a fungus, observes Ikenna's behaviour and tolerates him. Even after Ikenna fights him twice, he never fights back until the right time. Boja like a fungus attacks Ikenna and kills him then disappears. After killing Ikenna, Boja also disappears. The family and the police try to find him without success. However, he is found in the family well after a few days. "Just as fungus hides in the body of an ignorant host, Boja lived unseen in our compound for four days after Ikenna's death, without us knowing it. He was there hidden away, refusing to speak, while the entire district and even the town desperately searched for him" (220). Obioma, through the symbol of fungus, critiques the nation for turning a blind eye to what promotes ethnocentrism and rivalry between various tribes. Although politicians and autocrats behave as if they do not see the problem, they are part of the problem through poor leadership, corruption and nepotism. The problems experienced in Nigeria by the four major tribes are foregrounded in a symbol of fungus. The fungus spreads unseen and its effects are lethal. The problems exist within the country but ironically, the citizen does not see them. The Fishermen parodies the colonial powers for defragmenting African states into incompatible units. These units called nations have no unifying factor to abide them together as an entity. Obioma feels this is a part of a wider colonial strategy to dominate and subjugate African cultures. He creatively ties this idea with the madman's prophecy. Obioma provokes the readers' imagination by juxtaposing the image of a madman and the fungus. It is the madman who helps the growth of fungus in Nigeria and it is the Nigerian people who can only discover this fungus and remedy it.

2.4 Subverting the Prophecy

The ability of Obembe to notice small things and discover negligible details that others overlook makes him a search dog. Obioma uses the image of a search dog to present an educated man. Obembe's knowledge is obtained from books he reads. He is the one who discovers a loaded

gun in their new house at Akure. Ben writes: “We had just moved into the house and no one had looked behind the self to see the barrel of the pistol slightly sticking out under it” (272). The presence of a gun in the house points to the history of violence in the country. Nigeria has experienced a lot of coups since independence. The father always keeps talking about “before the war and after the war” which symbolizes the state of instability and tension in the house and the whole country. The inability of the rest of the family members to discover the gun foregrounds their blindness to see the destruction set by the colonialist. Obembe through his special talent is the only child destined to subvert the calamity by avenging his family.

Obembe also was the one who discovered what happened to Boja’s corpse. “Obembe showed me a small transparent jar that sat on that self. In it was a polythene bag containing something ash coloured and grey, like loamy sand, dug from under dead logs of wood dried in the sun to fine grains the size of salt” (273). After a few days, they confronted their father and Obembe told his father he knew what the strange substance in the container was. The father gave up and revealed that clansmen and relatives had warned him Boja committed an offence and it was sacrilegious to Ani, goddess of the earth for a person who committed murder or fratricide to be buried. Although the father was a staunch Christian, he adhered to tradition. This symbolizes the turning point of the father from western culture and abiding by his cultural demands. The departure is not only psychological but also physical. After the death of Boja and Ikenna, he secretly plans to avenge them. He plans to kill Abulu without success. This depicts the start of self-realization of the father. He undergoes conscious when he pats Obembe and Benjamin for avenging their brothers by killing Abulu. This change symbolizes the agency and needs of postcolonial African nations to become conscious of their ills and reform by shedding western customs to their cultures.

Obioma uses the symbol of a “leviathan” to present Abulu’s fighting back spirit. “...undying whale that could not be easily killed by a band of valiant sailors. He could not die as easily as

other men of flesh and blood” (302). The image of Leviathan is an allusion to Herman Melville’s novel *Moby Dick*. Just like in *Moby Dick*, the mad man takes a supernatural and metaphysical symbol. In *Moby Dick* Leviathan is a white whale that Captain Ahab vows to kill to avenge its attack on him amputating his leg and causing death to other sailors. Captain Ahab goes after the white whale coercing the sailors to join him, but the tale ends with more casualties. Abulu like the white whale causes suffering to Agwu’s family. The family vows to kill him in revenge. Like Leviathan, he does not die easily and fights back inflicting more pain to society. He gives prophecies that tickle residents of Akure. He does things against the approved Akure culture in what Obioma likens to western culture. Therefore, Abulu is a symbol of colonialism and its deeds to African culture. The image of Abulu as a Leviathan draws the reader’s attention to the difficulty of shedding off the colonial domination. His superhuman action is depicted when a car knocked him out of the road when he was conversing with an apparition of his mother. People believed he died but he woke up to their amazement and walked;

When he stood, he began flapping his drenched clothes as though the car had merely blown a cloud of dust on him. He would limp away, frequently turning to the way car had gone and saying: “do you want to kill someone, eh? Can’t you stop when you see a woman on the road? Do you want to kill a person?” he limped on, asking innumerable questions as he went away, sometimes stopping to take a backward glance with his hands on the lobe of his ear to admonish the driver to drive slowly next time: you hear, you hear? (304).

The presentation of Abulu as a ghost symbolizes the colonialist’s culture, which many Africans perceive as “strange”. Obembe’s plan to poison Abulu with a rat poison does not materialize. His father’s attempt to kill Abulu also fails and leaves him with an injury and the only plan that succeeds is the use of fishing hooks.

The death of Abulu is represented as a symbol of the African journey back to re-cognise, reinvent, and re-member its culture. The journey involves the dismantling the colonialist culture as depicted through Abulu's actions and embracing the African culture. The African culture as represented in the image of river Omi Ala was discarded and demonised by the colonialists who equated it to darkness. The colonialists are depicted to have disordered African cultures by propagating their own culture. Ngugi argues that for Africans to regain their identity they must shed off the colonialist culture. He points out that the shedding off of colonialism can only be achieved by maintaining African languages and use of African names. Obioma seems to agree with Ngugi's ideologies as he symbolises the four young boys fishing back their identity. Although Nigeria attained its independence in 1960, the reality, like in many other postcolonial states in Africa, independence is only a flag. The economic control remained with the colonizers while the local leaders became western stooges deployed for the colonizers' interests. Additionally, Ngugi is of the opinion that African Languages and its revival in writing would be the first step towards the liberation of Africans from the colonial mind set. However, Chinua Achebe, the counterpart of Obioma is of the opinion that Africans should use whichever language they deem fit and even go as far as Africanizing English for their own use and salvation but at the same time to be in tune with those it deems as enemies.

2.3 River (and the life in it) Symbolism as a macrocosm of Nature and passage of Time

The symbol of the river in *The Fishermen* is multi-layered and foregrounds different meanings. Though not one embedded in animal imagery but one that is hinged on the environment it is worth discussing its importance to the text, *The Fishermen*. This recurring use of the river parallels the text's title *The Fishermen* in that it provides cohesion to the text's imagery and the rivers symbolic meanings. Fishermen use water bodies like the sea, lake or large rivers to fish. Nigeria is a country in West Africa which has its coast lying to the Gulf of Guinea in the south and Lake Chad to the northeast. It is a country that is rich in rivers and reservoirs. The narrator goes to tell us about the history and the grim image of the river Omi-Ala. He says, "Omi Ala

was a dreadful river: long forsaken by its inhabitants of Akure town like a mother abandoned by her children” (27). However, the narrator says that was not the history of Omi-Ala for he recalls that,

Like many such rivers in Africa, Omi-Ala was once believed to be a god; people worshipped it. They erected shrines in its name, and courted the intercession and guidance of Iyemoja, Osha, mermaids, and other spirits and gods that dwelt in water bodies. This changed when the colonialists came from Europe, and introduced the Bible, which then prized Omi-Ala’s adherents from it, and the people, now largely Christians, began to see it as an evil place. A cradle besmeared (27).

According to Bayyinah S Jefferies in *Oshun Yoruba Deities*, she says that the Oshun is an Orish, deity, of the Yoruba people who is associated with water, purity, fertility, love and sensuality. The Orisha was also a maintainer of the spiritual balance as well as the mother of sweet things. The narrator however, juxtaposes the past, a time gone when African philosophy, cosmology and religiosity was part of the culture, with that of the contemporary present to denote changes within time frame just as the flow of the river. The river thereby becomes a post and mirror of reflection of time past and present time.

The grim image is equated to the sadness of a mother who is abandoned by her children. Despite it being dreadful and superstitious to Akure residents, the boys find it as a place where they can find peace and adventure. However, the residents hold the river with prejudice emanating from its bad image. The author indicates the source of the bad image is because of dark rumours that people committed all sorts of evils on its banks (28). The river is a symbol of African culture. In the text ‘the river’ is depicted as pure and a place where the residents of Akure performed their rites before the coming of colonialism. After the arrival of colonialism, the river is depicted as forsaken by natives thereby acquiring the dreadful image of “evil”. Once a pure river, it supplied the earliest settlers with clean drinking water and fish. The river before the invasion of colonialism and him brainwashing the locals was a religious place “Omi-Ala was once

believed to be a god; people worshipped it” (27). The river, is not only a source of water and food, but also a religious place. The natives erected shrines and sought guidance from gods believed to dwell in the water bodies. The image of the river, however, changed when the colonialists invaded Africa and introduced the Bible. Colonialists converted natives’ religious beliefs to Christianity and their perception of their culture changed. They started to see their cultures as evil, superstitious and retrogressive. Because of shrines and rituals performed at the banks of the river, the newly converted Africans abandoned it and the river and the shrine became a detested place. “This was supported by accounts of corpses, animal carcasses and other ritualistic materials floating on the surface of the river or lying on its bank” (28). Obioma foregrounds the tragedy of the boys through fish they got from Omi Ala. The delicate creatures only survived in the dirty water, but when they were fished, their future became untenable.

...when it steadied, its arms flailed briefly and then I heard the sound of Obembe’s tin fall and felt a splash of its content on my leg. Two small fish-one on which Ikenna had argued was a *Sympysodon*-shot out of the tin and began writhing and thrashing about in the dirt, it muddied by the spilled water as the tin swung from side to side, spurting out more water and tadpoles until it stilled (125-126).

Despite the negative representation of the river, fish and tadpoles survive in it. Ironically, when the boys fished them out no matter how they tried to preserve them, they died. The image of a fish’s inability to survive from its natural habitat symbolizes the instability of colonialist’s culture to African society. It symbolises that Africa cannot progress outside its culture. Although the Christians abandoned the filthy river because of its sin, the boys enjoy adventuring to the river. They find peace while playing in the river and it does not only work as a place for adventure, but also, they fish and sell them for their economic growth. Their interest in the river led them to discover and learn a lot especially of the madman’s prophecy.

Christians are represented as hypocrites in the text. The negative image of Christianity as a foreign culture is presented in various ways. The boys who adventure into river Omi Ala invents

a song. The song is a variation of a song performed by the adulterous wife of Pastor Ishawuru to praise their activities at the river:

Dance all you want

Fight all you will

We've caught you

You cannot escape

Haven't we caught you?

You certainly can't escape.

We, the fishermen, have caught you

We, the fishermen,

Have caught you, you can't escape (29).

The song parodies the Christians by changing the original tune and adding other words e.g. "the fishermen have caught you". They also replaced the pastor's wife's testimony to God's ability to hold her up against the power of Satan's temptation with their ability to hold the fish firm when they caught it and never let it escape. This takes Mbembe's arguments about grotesque and obscenity that are inherent to all systems of domination and how the dominated deconstructs such elements. The dominated people develop ways to satirize the dominating factor by changing words or tone variations as a means of resistance (131). The boys' variations are part of the resistance to the domination of the western culture. It also symbolizes their resistance to Christians' ignorance. The author satirizes the religion when the boys always prayed for every new ball they bought to protect it from destruction. Kayonde who comes from a sprawling population of the acutely poor in the neighbourhood was ordained to conduct the prayers because he could not afford even a "Kobo" (cent) the boys contributed to buy the ball. The prayers are depicted to have no effect as the ball once flew over a neighbour's fence and

hit a crippled man on the head, it also shattered the glass windows of their neighbours. This symbolises that prayers without proper mechanisms to achieve the desired objectives can never work. The inability of prayers to protect the boys' ball ridicules Africans' over-reliance on foreign culture instead of taking control of their affairs.

When Abulu in 1993 was caught clinging to the colourful statue of the Madonna outside St. Andrew's Cathedral, humping against it, Christians gathered laughing at him. Despite them knowing he was a madman they silently watch him "sinning". After the incident, the Catholic Council pulled down the desecrated statue and erected a new one inside the church for much protection. "Then, as if still unsatisfied they surrounded the statue with an iron gate" (134). The church instead of pitying the madman and providing necessary support or medication ironically protects the statue. The incident presents an image of how hypocritical Africans take religion and delineate themselves from reality.

In another instance, their mother summons her husband from Yola after the boys were reported to have gone fishing in river Omi Ala, Obembe and Benjamin resort to prayers to escape the father's punishment:

Father visited that Saturday, precisely five days after we were caught fishing in the river. Obembe and I made an exigent prayer on the eve of his visit after I'd suggested that God could touch father's heart and make him refrain from whipping us. Together we knelt on the floor and prayed: "Lord Jesus if you say you love us-Ikenna Boja, Ben and me," he began. "don't allow Father to visit again. Let him stay in Yola, please Jesus. Please listen to me: you know how hard he could whip us? Don't you even know? Listen, he has cowhides, kobokos he bought from the meat-roasting mallam-that one is painful! Listen, Jesus, if you let him come back and he whips us, we won't go to Sunday school again and we would sing and clap in the church ever again! Amen! (43)

Through the child narrator's innocence, the author makes the reader see an image of ignorance that the boys have learned from society. By addressing Jesus directly, they believe that their

problem would be solved. The prayer is not heard thus their father arrival back home when summoned by their mother to punish the children for misbehaving by venturing at the cursed river, Omi Ala. Ironically, he arrives and they are heavily punished for adventuring at the river. This symbolises that the urge of Africans to revert to their culture is not an easy path and will require dedication. In addition, the prayer also represents the violence the boys meted from their father's punishment. The punishment cannot be avoided by prayers and that why they result to avenge their beating by beheading Mama Iyabo's rooster.

The ambiguous representation of the river is also manifested in what Mbembe calls "the grotesque and obscene". The writer satirizes the African leaders for their blindness and the subjection of their citizens. The grotesque representation of the river is achieved through images of filth. The grotesque is also achieved through the image of Abulu, who uses vulgar language and always depicted in nudity to ridicule the public. The narrator writes; "He would disrupt anything to declare his visions —even funerals. He became a prophet, a scarecrow, a deity, even an oracle. Often, though, he shattered both realms or moved between both as though the partition between them was only hymen thin" (135). The author vividly describes Abulu's character, and further uses sexual connotation to ridicule his character. Mbembe argues the use of sexual connotations in postcolonial states is a means of satirizing the dominating factors. Abulu as a representation of the Western culture is ridiculed hence making the reader conscious about the African culture.

The abandonment of the river symbolizes African abandonment of their cultural heritage and adopting the western culture. This, according to Bhabha, is as a result of hybridity. When two cultures meet there is a tendency of one culture subduing the other culture. Its personification as that surrounded snaked in length and breadth of Akure reflects the importance and sacredness it holds to its inhabitants. Just like in Ngugi's *The River Between*, where river Honia snakes between Kamenu and Mukuyu symbolizing the division between African tradition and the

Western culture, river Omi-Ala evokes an image of lost African heritage. Fishing symbolizes the quest for truth and digging up their historical background. It was to the shock of the parents to learn their children's behaviour. "so, Adaku you sit here and tell me in all truth that my boys- Ikenna, Bojanonimeokpu, Obembe, Benjamin- were the ones she saw at that river; that dangerous river under a curfew, where even adults are known to have disappeared?" (49). Although the father blames his wife for the children's misbehaviour when he was away, Obembe and Benjamin plan to avenge their brothers- by killing Abulu under his nose and he too does not have a clue.

2.4. Animal Images and Symbols and its Effectiveness

According to Parita Trivedi symbolism in a text is always a 'defamiliarising' device and contributes "meaning of the story (23)." Defamiliarization in Formalism is a concept that was put forward by Shklovsky who argues that it is a process of making a familiar object seems unfamiliar. The actions are slowed down, drawn out, or interrupted. This process brings to the reader's attention by making things cease to be perceived automatically. It is the process of foregrounding issues in a text.

Trivedi argues that symbolism serves as a "cognitive function by delighting the aesthetic sensibilities of the audience" (23). I agree with Trivedi's observations and I point out that the reason symbolism adds beauty to literature is that the reader is familiar with quality or attitude attributed to the symbols. Hence the ability to relate symbols to the intended meaning. The writer attributes human feelings and intentions to animal, object and other spectacles to awaken the reader's imagination, which forms in what Trivedi says; "a mental impression that can acquire a life of its own" (27). Trivedi's arguments concur with Sultan Somjee who points out that symbols influence the senses. Therefore, Obioma deploys animal symbols and imageries to foreground his concerns.

Obioma uses images and animal symbols to defamiliarise ‘making strange’ to bring into the reader’s consciousness of the deplorable conditions of post-colonial Nigeria. In *The Fishermen*, the use of images and animal symbols plays an important role in slowing, suspending and blocking the growth of the plot by arousing the reader’s imagination to have a mental picture of the author’s desired meaning. Obioma’s images and animal symbols create ambiguity and paradoxes drawn from oral traditions, folktales and contextual usage. Obioma deliberately merges images and symbols to slow down his readers’ imaginations and suspend the meaning in the text, when he presents Ikenna in both images of an eagle and sparrow the reader is made to reflect on both symbols and decipher the intended meaning. This technique is widely used in the text, for example; the mother is presented in both symbols of a mouse and a falconer. Obioma also highly borrows images and symbols from the oral tradition and contemporary symbols to bring out the meaning of the text. Chapter one begins; “We were fishermen: My brothers and I became fishermen in January of 1996 after our father moved out of Akure, a town in the west of Nigeria where we had lived together all our lives” (11).

The use of the word ‘we’ brings to the attention of the reader the narrative voice the author chooses. By using ‘we’ the narrator includes his brothers in the story not only as mere characters but protagonists in the story. The choice of words “we were Fishermen” also draws the reader’s attention; it asserts a perception of drawing fish from the water. It also suspends the reader’s imaginations as the focus moves away from the act of literally fishing to a deeper “fishing” of the boy’s historical perspective. The image of fishing moves from its literary meaning to symbolic meaning hence heightening the suspense and illusion in the novel.

It slows down the readers’ perception and creates an image in the mind; the description of Omi Ala evokes emotions of a neglected culture. However, Obioma does not reveal the motive of the boys’ adventure at the river until later in the text. The search for “whom we are” in the text is presented in the motif of fishing. The four boys’ decision to be fishermen gives them

opportunities to 'interrogate themselves' and find the missing links of their history. Their father had enclosed their mind in their small house at Akure and wished them to acquire Western education and become successful.

Obioma uses defamiliarisation to draw the readers' attention to the father's character. The act of the father leaving home is narrated dramatically. He sits on the couch reading the newspaper and making monologues and ignoring his wife's complain. The author also uses vivid descriptions and authorial intrusion to invite the reader to see the deteriorating situation in the family. Obioma uses defamiliarisation describing Yola town "... a town in the north that was a camel distance of more than one thousand kilometres away" (11). The image of a camel gives the reader an idea of hardship. The juxtaposition of camel and one thousand kilometres gives a panoramic view of physical distance and ideological differences between north and east in Nigeria. The camel symbolizes the hardship the family faces by parting and it foregrounds the tragedy that will follow later in the text. The scene allows the author to reflect on the occurrences that had promoted the father's transfer. The ensuing animal images and symbols foreground the author's thematic concerns. By giving Ikenna a symbol of a python in a western world's perception, he foregrounds issues of violence. He also draws the reader's imagination to see how the traditional culture has been eroded by westernization. The symbol of a python is ambiguous. In Igbo villages, python is not an evil animal but is a symbol of divinity. Achebe, in *Arrow of God*, presents python in a royal divinity form. It is a symbol of the conflict between the Western and the traditional culture. This is well foregrounded when Oduche, Ezeulu's son whom he sent to learn Whiteman's way captures a royal python and restrains it in the box:

It was not easy and the old priest was covered in sweat by the time he succeeded in forcing the box. What they saw was enough to blind a man. Ezeulu stood speechless. The women and the children who had watched from afar came running down. (*Arrow of God*, 18)

The crisis Oduche causes in Ezeulu's compound by restraining a python in his box symbolizes the sacredness of a python. In Igbo culture, anyone who killed a python committed an abomination and paid a hefty fine to appease the gods. Although the incident projects culture crash, it also gives a perception of python in Igbo culture. It is not only in Igbo culture where the symbol of a python is used positively. Amongst the Yoruba, the python is seen as a rainbow maker. It also provides gifts for humankind. Therefore, Obioma who is an Igbo mapping Ikenna as a python is ambiguous and intends to evoke the difference of the Western culture and the Igbo tradition. It also draws the reader to the crash of cultures as western cultures view python as a violent snake and the African traditions have a different belief about the same snake. Instead of Ikenna assuming the royalty of python in Igbo culture, he assumes the evil it symbolizes in the Western culture. This also symbolizes how the colonizers dominated African culture and subjugated it. Said argues this is a binary opposition where western is viewed as superior to the traditional African culture. The python in Igbo culture loses its meaning and assumes the western perception of evil. This is also reflected in the symbol of a spider used to narrate the sickness of the mother. In the Western African folklore, the spider is a witty and cunning creature. However, in the text, Obioma appropriates it as a symbol of crises. The spider is used as a metaphor for crises the country faces when tribes take on each other.

The author also defamiliarises the scene where the boys take revenge against Mama Iyabo who discovers them at the 'cursed river' and reports them to their mother. The incident is narrated in detail as though the incident foreshadows Ikenna - Boja fight in their homestead. It is worth noting that there is no direct mention of the violence but it is shown through imagery and animal symbols:

Boja set the petrified cock down on the chosen spot and took the knife that Obembe had brought from our kitchen. Ikenna joined him and together they held the chicken in place, unshaken by its loud squawks. Then we all watched as the knife moved in Boja's hand with unaccustomed ease, a downward slit through the rooster's wrinkled neck as he'd

handled the knife several times and as if he was determined to handle it yet again. (69-70)

The author makes deliberate diction by referring to the cock differently in the same paragraph. He uses words such as cock, chicken and rooster to draw the reader's attention. The choice of names here is intentional and symbolic. When Boja is holding the rooster alone it is referred to as a cock. The image of a cock symbolizes Boja usurping the power of leadership from Ikenna. The cock symbolically represents power contestation between Boja and Ikenna. Boja's ability to hold the cock alone hence takes power from Ikenna—it symbolically presents the power contest between the two major tribes in Nigeria. The cock in this context is a symbol of domination, power and force. The contestation between the two leads to tension and disillusionment in the country. It also foregrounds the domination of Ikenna by Boja.

When Ikenna joins Boja to hold the rooster together and dismember its head, it is referred to as a chicken. The feminine representation here is symbolic; it draws the reader's attention to powerless Ikenna. It reinforces the domination of Boja over Ikenna. Interestingly, when Boja slits its neck, the narrator terms it as a rooster. The masculine elements captured here evoke the reader's imagination of Boja's dominance over Ikenna. The beheading of the rooster by Boja symbolically represents his impending murder of his brother. Obioma uses sound and sight images to expound on the fragile nature of the relationship that exists between the boys. This scene also symbolizes the inhumane escalation of violence in Nigeria amongst different tribes. The marginalization of some tribes is what creates tension and violence narrated in the text.

The incident is narrated in a manner that evokes emotions; the dark image of murder symbolizes disunity and hatred that is deeply rooted in various tribes in Nigeria. It also foregrounds disaster that underlies in the country and its fragile politics.

2.5 Animal Imageries and Animal Symbols as an Advancement of the Plot

The Fishermen is organized into partitions (Chapters with Subtitles). These chapters are organized to deal with a specific character represented using an animal symbol highlighting specific issues affecting the Agwu household. The organization helps the novel to advance its issues in an organized manner; it also helps the narrator to deal with issues of reminiscence while narrating the story.

The chapter named “Fishermen” which is also the title of the novel, deals with an exposition of the family and prepares the reader to the building conflict after the father is transferred to Yola and the four boys’ are left exposed without someone strong to monitor their activities. As fishermen, they are able to highlight the conflict that exists between Christianity and Traditional Spirituality; the changes and modernity that face contemporary Nigeria. Another chapter named “The Metamorphosis” focuses on the conflict development within the family. It gives the background information missing in earlier chapters through flashbacks. Obioma uses animal symbols to give unity to these chapters’ example. Ikenna the Python becomes a sparrow after his death. He is depicted to be weak and easily scared away, Ikenna as a sparrow ironically becomes so weak and homeless. The paradoxical representation symbolizes the lack of ideological stand of African rulers. They rule with the fist but they are also vulnerable and weak, after exerting much pressure on the citizen, resistance is inevitable. They are easily dislodged from power through violent coups. The scene can also be seen to metaphorically represent Sani Abacha and the dictatorial powers he wedged to the Nigerian citizens. In 1998 he was overthrown and later died a lonely man. It also occurred that M.K.O Abiola died a few days before his release from incarceration. The death of Abiola raised suspicions of torture in jail. Therefore, the partitioning of the novel is a plot strategy that allows the text to focus on a single issue at a time and enhance its coherence.

Formalists understand a literary work as unique and self-fulfilling. They argue a text can be understood from within without relying on external influences. They focus mainly on the text's literariness. They argue that the language used in the text is different from everyday language. Literary language foregrounds itself through the illuminating structure, images, symbols, and other figurative languages. However, a critic like Taylor Coleridgean views literature as possessing the ability to speak for itself. He asserts that each work contains in itself, the reason it is the way it is and not otherwise. He asks the reader to desist from engaging a text-only to finding meaning. Therefore, the reader should examine symbols in a text carefully. The reader should find out if the idea or object is repeated for emphasis or how the author positions it to illuminate its symbolical representation. I agree with Perrone by suggesting Obioma's use of images and animal symbols is a strategy to critique postcolonial Nigeria.

Since formalists differentiate between a story and a plot, it is paramount to point out that these elements are vital for the understanding of a text. E. M. Forster points that a plot always flows: "The king died, and as a result of remorse, the queen died too" (61). He differentiates plot with a story, which he defines as "a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence" (61). He gives the difference of a plot as a narrative of events, where the emphasis is on the causality. The causality of the plot arouses the reader's curiosity to ask and what next. The arrangements of events in the text highlight the causality they hold a reader's attention through suspense.

Further in *Poetics*, Aristotle represents plot as "the combination of the incidents, of things done in the story" (30). The plot, therefore, includes a flow of events that reflect cause and effect to each other. In explaining the plot, Forster says that in a narrative of events "the time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it" (60). Forster maintains that this is a kind of a plot with a mystery in it; it forms the capability of high development. "It suspends the time-sequence; it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow" (61). In suspending the time sequence, the writer is able to create foreshadows and flashbacks in the

text. However, in the text, all these actions, incidents, thoughts, and observations are tied together to form an organic unity.

Obioma's *The Fishermen* uses a frame plot. The frame story technique is where there is the main story, which unites other stories within the text. In *The Fishermen*, the concept can be seen where the main story is that of the Agwu family and the tragedy they face. Within the story exists a micro-story of Nigeria history from 1993 – 2003 which saw antagonism between military dictator Sani Abacha and M.K.O Abiola. Obioma's creatively unites the two stories into one narrative.

Although the two stories seem disconnected and running independently, they converge at one point. Obioma uses first-person narration voice to the two stories and avoids narrating them as different stories. The narrator in the text reports the events of the two stories as they happened before him. This helps him from digressing from his thematic concerns and losing the focus of the story. This enhances Obioma interrogate problems that affect post-colonial Nigeria. The unity of the two stories presents the interrelatedness of domestic violence and the political violence experienced in Nigeria. The author imagines that it is hard to separate political instability and family problems as narrated in the text. What comes out is that the sibling rivalry and tribal animosity experienced in postcolonial Nigeria has its root in colonialism. The white man created a country formed from many ethnic backgrounds who do not hold any cultural or ideological cohesion and as a result of unending violence.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated the use of animal imagery and animal symbols in *The Fishermen* and additionally, I examined and discussed how Obioma employs animal imagery and animal symbols within the text. Additionally, through the animal imagery and symbols, there exists a synching of the natural state in which the animals exist, in this case, the river symbolism which accentuates the animals that live within it like fish and humans and other animals which used it

for their survival. As an African and folkloric aspect of storytelling Obioma uses it to investigate and codify the traits of culture from Igbo to a contemporary setting (time and space) as well as question, reflect what ails Nigeria. Not only is the animal imagery a point of distancing and understanding human behaviour and traits, it also adds to the aesthetic value of writing and takes us back to the past while enmeshing the historical development of Nigeria as a country through looking back to understand where the rain started beating us from. In the next chapter, I will examine the effectiveness of the journey motif as a literary style used in *The Fishermen* as is used to decipher the understanding of imagery within the text and therefore add to the effectiveness of the use of imagery.

CHAPTER THREE

A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF DISCOVERY

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focused on how Obioma deploys imagery and animal symbols to advance the plot, thematic concerns and aesthetic value in the text. The chapter examined Obioma's appropriation of animals' symbols as a critique of postcolonial Nigeria. In this chapter explores how the author effectively uses journey to depict how the characters' attempt to rediscovery their self-consciousness in hard times. Symbols and images are used to illustrate issues afflicting the Agwu family. The novel uses images of a journey to invoke the reader to question the journey various characters undertake in the text, hence invoking questions of identity and belonging in the family and as a macrocosm of various tribes in Nigeria. The use of a journey motif echoes concepts and ideologies presented by earlier novelists like Achebe, Armah, and Ngugi amongst others, who use the journey as a symbol to explore the problems postcolonial Africa faces. This chapter therefore aims to investigate how the characters in *The Fishermen* try to find their distorted identity from the disillusionment of colonialism and neo-colonialism and how they try to become whole through these multiple selves for a cohesive sense of belonging formation.

3.1 The Journey Motif in *The Fishermen*

Carl Jung defines motif as "a figure that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is manifested" (Dobie 59). Jung appreciates that a motif is a 'figure of language' that keeps on recurring in a text and adds meaning to it. On the journey motif, Jung observes that the character is presented taking a journey in a quest for something. Therefore, 'the journey' becomes a symbol of the quest the character struggles to achieve. In addition, a journey motif in a literary work carries a symbolic meaning, which according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* a motif is a "dominant or recurring idea in an artistic work." Mugo Gichohi defines

a motif as “a symbolic literary element that the author recurrently and consistently uses as a basic tool and through which he blends the form and content of his novel, thereby significantly contributing to the meaning of the text” (28). He further observes that it is almost impossible to find any literary work that does not deploy a kind of journey which the characters undertake to find meaning in their life or whom they are (2). Keeping in mind Mugo’s observations this study also argues that the motifs authors use is concretised using the images. The author creates mental images to offer meaning overtly or covertly. Therefore, it is the role of the reader to search the meaning in either way.

The ‘journey’ in *The Fishermen* is deployed to guide the reader to see, move and develop with the characters’ growth from that naivety to self-realization or doom. It is also deployed to depict the Nigeria journey of time from pre-independence to date. A close examination of the characters’ journeys—either physical, emotional or psychological—invites the reader to relate the Agwu family with Nigeria’s historical journey from the pre-colonial, colonial to postcolonial era. Through symbols and imageries, the author invites the reader to locate the identity crises faced by various characters because of colonialism. In addition, Obioma uses different characters’ journeys to examine the realities in postcolonial Nigeria. The journey is clearly mapped in the text; the author manifests it through the physical, psychological and emotional journeys of the characters.

Therefore, a journey motif is a symbolic element used by authors to cement meaning in a text by blending content and form. It also foregrounds characters, plot and themes. The journeys are instrumental in the structure of the novel as they inform the plot, the character’s exposition and cementing of the meaning of the novel. In addition, the understanding of the journey motif is drawn from the point that the character starts the journey from a point of naivety at the beginning of the journey but ends in a more complete and conscious character at the end.

3.2 The Journey to Self-discovery

Mildred Mortimer observes that journeys are “forced marches in which a traveler is seeking exorcism or an exile in search of a new home” (169). Mortimer believes that in a journey motif, the character must be adventuring to discover ‘something’. It is also a journey that an individual is forced to escape an immediate environment that is oppressive in a search for comfort. The reference of ‘home’ in her definition is used as a symbol of freedom an individual seeks by taking such a journey. I find Mortimer’s argument persuasive, however, the home or the contentedness an individual is seeking can sometimes be a nightmare and unachievable. In *The Fishermen*, for instance, the four young boys take an adventure to the river—Omi-Ala—in search of a freer space away from home, but it is during one of their adventures at the ‘cursed’ river that they encounter Abulu, ‘the madman’, who prophesies Ikenna would die in the hand of one of his brothers (a fisherman). This prophecy is projected as the main cause of tensions and fights between the brothers. At the climax, Boja kills Ikenna and later commits suicide. Therefore, the brother's adventure to seek a freer space outside their home does not bring contentedness but instead, turns out to be a tragedy. However, the psychological and emotional journeys of many other characters in the text direct to self-discovery journeys. The main characters in the text take journeys in quest of meaning. Just like in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* where the protagonist, the man, goes through a journey to hell to come to self-realisation, the main characters in *The Fishermen* undertake journeys in quest of self-consciousness and to depict social realities in postcolonial Nigeria.

3.3 Physical Journey

Obioma, in *The Fishermen*, uses images of physical journeys as a tool to foreground the issue of identity and belonging amongst various family members in the text, which can also be interpreted variously to refer to Nigeria as a nation. Masumi Odari in an article ‘Self-identity: Reflection on Yusuf K. Dawood’ notes that peoples’ identity is formed in “dynamic relationship to our environments and the formative role that particular localities play in our lives

is reinforced when our environment changes...” (10). Odari’s observations are in line with the character’s identity formation. She appreciates that the immediate environment where the character appears, plays a big role in the formation of their identity. Therefore, the setting of the novel and places the character journeys in the story plays a key role in exploring the characters’ identity formation. The physical journey of various characters in the text communicates a deeper meaning to the reader. Obioma uses the setting to depict various characters on a journey to a search for who they are. The movement of characters from one setting to another reveals their continuous growth from naivety towards self-consciousness. It is also a “symbolic journey” where the author leads the reader to the characters’ development from naïve to self-realized characters. It is a journey to self-realization and a journey of postcolonial Nigeria.

The Fishermen opens with an exposition that the father has received a letter to transfer from Akure to Yora, a town in northern Nigeria. The transfer is represented in an image of a physical journey that portends separation of the father from his family. The impending journey depicts the building of conflict and tension in the family. It is at this point that the author presents the reader with heightened suspense between the father and mother. The children are depicted as naïve and reliant on their parents for all their happiness and sadness that changes as the novel builds up. For instance, when the kids were young, the essence of time is projected as being longer and everyday dragging, however when their father is transferred and leaves for Yola, the narrator says their lives were never the same again and they noticed the changes in living. Ben writes “My brothers—Ikenna, Boja Obembe—and I had come to understand that when the two ventricles of our home—our father and mother-held silence as the ventricles of the heart retain blood, we could flood the house if we poked them” (12). The author uses a metaphor of the heart ventricles which hold blood in the heart to reinforce the important role the two parents played in the children’s vision and life. It is not only for their daily needs but also for their

identity formation. The departure of the father from the home to work at Yola foregrounds a malfunctioning family. However, the mother objects the fathers' relocation. She argues that the separation of the father from the family will be of no good to the family. Through the mother's monologues, it can be noted that the father and the mother have contrasting conflicts about the transfer. The 'transfer' connotes the physical journey the father is about to undertake. The father's journey marks other family's journeys as they seek to discover who they are. Although the mother objects the father's transfer to Yola, the state of things dictates the urgency of the father to relocate. The family relies on the father as the sole breadwinner; he works very hard to provide for the family. However, it is quite paradoxical that the mother also wants the father to continue providing for the children. "What kind of job takes a man away from bringing up his growing sons? Even if I were born with seven hands, how would I be able to care for these children alone?" (10). The mother wants the father of the kids to not leave for his station which is the same as absconding his duties that may lead him to be fired as well as she expects that the father to be able to provide for the family, discipline his sons and also protect the family.

The father's departure is a journey that seems like the only way to continue being a breadwinner and the 'man' of the house. However, the journey is not as smooth as it is in Akure. Firstly, the distance from Akure to Yola is dangerous and rocky. The narrator uses an image of a camel to describe the distance from Akure and Yola. "His employer, (father) the Central Bank of Nigeria, had transferred him to a branch of the ban in Yola—a town in the north that was a camel distance..." (11). Although the metaphor depicts the child narrator's obsession with animals, the image of a camel symbolizes the hardships the journey would present to the family. Secondly, it depicts the defragmentation of the Nigerian society on its ethnicity sections, where people from one section of the country are perceived to be different with the other part of the country. This has created animosity between north and west of Nigeria. The narrator reveals that the residents of Yola (northerners) who are mainly Hausa and Fulani's are unfriendly to

southerners' —Igbo and Yoruba. The author narrates, “Yola, he reiterated, was a volatile city with a history of frequent large-scale violence especially against people of our tribe—the Igbo” (13). The violence against Igbo is depicted as a historical injustice culminating from colonialization and the father’s journey to the north is an attempt to amend the hostility by working for the “enemy” tribe.

The state of antagonism between various tribes is a continuation of colonialism and imperialism in post-colonial states as Said argues that the idea of colonialism was that the colonized was not like the colonialists and hence deserved to be ruled. The colonized became “others”. Said argues that in order for postcolonial states to prosper, this idea of “others” must be abolished with its racial, tribal and religious prejudices. Therefore, the journey of the father to Yola can be viewed as an attempt to amend the tribal differences. The government deploys its workers to different regions from their home regions as attempts at reconciling ethnic animosity within the country. In addition, it can be understood to be one of the physical barriers to the father from carrying along with his entire family to Yola. The fear of violence by northerners against the Igbo people depicts the tensions that exist between various tribes in Nigeria. The precarious situation is foregrounded as one of the social disorders and mistrusts in the country and it results in family breakdowns as well as a disillusioned state. When riots broke in Akure after the disputed elections between Babangida and Abiola, the four brothers witness a horrific ethnic cleansing along Akure streets. They come across a group of men armed with clubs and machetes chanting, “Death to Babangida, Abiola must rule” (170). Although the violence must be seen as a contest between the two contenders, the narrator makes it clear when he writes. “we could tell from the man’s attire—a long, flowing Senegalese robe —that he was a northerner: the main targets of the onslaught by M.K.O Abiola supporters, who’d hijacked the riots as the struggle between his west, and the north, where the military president, General Babangida belonged” (171). Although the narrator does not depict the main cause of the violence between the north and

west, he alludes to his father's sentiments "before the war" which points to the Nigerian civil war also known as the Biafran war that began in 1967 – 1970. Scholars and critics have viewed this war was because of colonization where different tribes with no cultural identity were forced together to form a nation. The result is the various tribes rising against each other. This has given birth to secession debates, the major attempt being in 1967 when southeast Nigeria predominantly occupied by Igbo attempted to secede and create a Biafra state. However, the federal government army quashed this attempt in three years of a bloody war. Achebe in *There was a Country* vividly captures the war criticising the colonialist and neo-colonialism to have contributed heavily to the civil war. Although the tone of secession of various regions of Nigeria has toned down, the violence amongst various tribes is still rife. In addition, other radical groups like Boko Haram have emerged complicating the situation in Nigeria.

3.4 Brothers' Journey

Ikenna and Boja lead Obembe and Ben to adventure outside their home into a dangerous neighbourhood. Their adventures lead them into a cursed river (Omi-Ala); they come along a madman called Abulu who like other madmen adventures in lonely places. He prophesies that Ikenna will die in the hand of his brother. The prophecy extends the tension in the novel as Ikenna attempts to run away from the madman's prophesy. Ikenna in an attempt to escape the madman's prophesy takes a journey from his home to the streets of Akure where he reveals realities at the streets of Nigeria.

The author takes the reader in the Agwu family life and their struggles depicting the hardships the Nigerian economy experienced in the 1990s and the ethnic violence experienced. It is through Ikenna's journeys that the reader is made to see a fragile nation prone to violence and disillusionment which Obioma points to colonization and poor leadership. Therefore, the physical journey of the father depicts the tension between Igbos and northern tribes i.e. Hausa and Fulani. Ironically, it is through this journey that the father's identity changes start. This is

represented when the father resigns from his job at Yora and returns to Akure to reorganise his traumatised family after Ikenna and Boja deaths.

3.5 Exposing Disillusionment

Disillusionment is a major theme in *The Fishermen*. Few years after independence most African literary writers stopped romanticising of decolonisation and engaged in ironical, satirical and symbolic representation of neo-colonisation. The shift was occasioned by the writers' attempt to depict the wrong turns most of the postcolonial African state took after the independence. A writer like Achebe in *A Man of the People* casts a deep net to the state of disillusionment and political consciousness in the wake of colonial freedom. He castigates the leaders who are driven by the greed of money and power instead of improving the lives of the citizens.

Obioma in *The Fishermen* does not only capture the state of disillusionment. He traces the onset of the disillusioned journey. In the text, the major characters are depicted taking physical journeys; Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Ben are depicted taking various physical journey. At the beginning of the novel, the four brothers are depicted to be physically, emotionally and psychologically tormented by their father. Their identity is demented and crushed by their father and they live in a state of confusion. The father dictates everything in their lifestyle holds their dreams, wishing them to succeed in a “westernized” lifestyle. Ben narrates, “He spoke slowly, his voice deeper and louder, every word tacked nine inches deep into the beams of our mind. So that, if we went ahead and disobeyed, he would make us conjure the exact moment he gave us the instruction in its complete detail with the simple phrase “I told you” (14). The narrator confirms the father’s instructions were not mere words but the instruction that was stuck in their minds defining their identities. The father used physical violence and psychological warfare to make sure that the four brothers toed his ways. However, when he relocates from Akure to Yola, the four brothers start exploring the ‘outside world.’ The narrator explains the reason the four brothers explore outside their home, “We shelved our books and set out to explore the

scared world outside the one we used to know” (17). The four brothers desire to explore the outside world, which their father had denied them, take them to a physical journey in their neighbourhoods and the world outside to satisfy their curiosity on finding out who they are. Along the way they meet various obstacles, firstly they meet the street boys who terrorize them. The narrator says; “We ventured to the municipality football pitch where most of the boys of the street played football every afternoon. But these boys were a pack of wolves; they did not welcome us” (14). The author uses the image of wolves to describe the street boy’s reception of the four brothers. The author uses a wolf to depict the violence the four brothers encountered outside their home. This also foregrounds the numerous challenges lurking ahead for the four brothers along the way in discovering who they are. The ‘world outside’ their home is extremely dangerous and marks the start of Obembe and Ben’s journey to self-consciousness. The street boys taunted and flogged them. They held them with contempt. In this scenario, the street boys use violence to dominate the streets. Mbembe on *Postcolonial* argues that:

The third form of violence was designed to ensure this authority’s maintenance, spread, and permanence. Falling well short of what is properly called “war,” it recurred again and again in the most banal and ordinary situations. It then crystallized, through a gradual accumulation of numerous acts and rituals—in short, played so important a role in everyday life that it ended up constituting the central cultural imaginary that the state shared with society, and thus had an authenticating and reiterating function. Colonial sovereignty only existed in areas where these three forms of violence were deployed, forming a seamless web. This violence was of a very particular sort, immediately tangible, and it gave the natives a clear notion of themselves in proportion to the power that they had lost (25-26).

The violence in the streets is a replica of what is happening on the Nigerian streets. The tribal violence and animosity can be attributed to colonial domination during the scramble and partition of Africa as well as the dictatorship of the ruling elites and tyrants. The four brothers,

faced discrimination and oppression by street children who considered them strangers. To stop being victims of the street boys, Ben writes:

Ikenna, seeing that we were outnumbered and would not have won a fight against the boys, begged them repeatedly in the custom of Christian children to refrain from insulting our parents who had done nothing wrong to them. Yet they continued, until one evening when Ikenna, maddened at the mention of the moniker, head-butted a boy.
(14)

The street boys met Ikenna (the spokesperson) with severe violence. This foregrounds dangers the four brothers go through while undertaking the self-realization journey. The violence becomes a part of the four brothers' obstacles in their journey towards self-discovery. The four brothers question themselves why the street children treat them with contempt. They discover that the street boys consider them 'amateurs' despite their being experts in playing football because they considered them 'privileged' as their father was rich and worked with the Central Bank of Nigeria. The author foregrounds the ideology of 'others' and 'us' which is a divide and rule policy propagated by colonialists and one that exists in postcolonial Nigeria and many contemporary countries. The class stratification and inequality depict inequality amongst residents of Akure where the rich isolate themselves from the poor creating a big division in the society. The Agwu family is depicted as a rich family and alienated from its society. The author depicts the family 'alienation' through the rejection of the four brothers by the street boys. The street boys consider them 'privileged'. A thin membrane of hatred foregrounded through "othering" also divides the Nigerian tribes. This creates mistrust, tension and tribal clashes amongst various tribes who consider themselves as 'us' and other tribes as 'others'. In addition, the father seems not only estranged from his society but also to the family.

The brothers' journey outside their home brings to their conscious a world full of challenges and contradictions. After a hostile reception by the street boys, Ikenna and Boja explore other options to adventure. It is at this point that they become 'fishermen' a symbolic representation

of searching their identity and belonging. Solomon introduces the idea of fishing to Ikenna. He describes it as a thrilling experience that is rewarding because they can sell some of the fish and make money. The fishing is carried out with a lot of zeal until the boys' neighbours (Mama Iyabo) discovers them along the river. "We knew our parents would severely punish us if they ever found out we were going to the river. Yet we did not give it a thought until one of our neighbours... caught us on the path to the river and reported us to the mother" (28). The discovery of their adventure to the river results to a thorough thrashing by their father. The beating marks another chapter in the boys' quest for whom they are; they organize a retaliation to Mama Iyabo. "About an hour after Father left for Yola that morning, Ikenna gathered Boja, Obembe and me in his room just as mother went to church with our Young siblings, and declared that we must punish Iya Iyabo, the woman who told on us" (64). The revenge sets the brothers journey towards various vengeance they conduct. The four boys scale over Iyabo's fence to capture one of her roosters and brutally slit its neck. Although this scene foregrounds the brutality and violence between Ikenna and Boja, it also depicts the start of differences between the siblings. Ikenna starts to distance himself from the rest of his brothers spending most of his time inside his room. Ben writes, "The thing that was consuming Ikenna was like a tireless enemy, hiding inside him, biding its time while we opted and carried our revenge on Iya Iyabo" (72). It is this vengeful character of Ikenna that makes him to distance from the siblings and his stubborn nature against authority.

The author depicts Ikenna's metamorphosis in an image of the python, which is related to sorrow, agility, loneliness and violence that defined him. In addition, the journey leads him away from the family to the city. The narrator writes:

He'd probably crossed the road to the other side of the street, walked northwards to Sabo, along the dirt road that led further into the part of the city where old hills rose above three schools, a cinema in a crumbling building and a big mosque, from where

the muezzin called for prayers through mighty loudspeakers at dawn every day. He never returned that day. He slept somewhere he never disclosed (82-83).

The journey of Ikenna away from home reveals the inequality amongst the Akure residents; the narrator gives a glimpse image of northwards of Sabo, which is depicted as a dirt road and a cinema in a crumbling building. The author's aim is to bring to the readers' consciousness the disillusionment that accompanies postcolonial Nigeria. The unkempt roads and the dangerous building also contribute to the behaviour and emotions of the citizens as Ikenna after quarrels with the family leaves the tranquillity of their neat home to the unkempt parts of the town.

3.6 Character Journey

3.6.1 Questioning Ikenna's identity

It is after the Madman's prophecy that Ikenna takes a different physical journey around the town and in their compound. The journey contributes to Ikenna's character traits as he attempts to escape the prophecy. Obioma writes "Ikenna was undergoing a metamorphosis: a life-changing experience that continued with each passing day. He closed himself off from the rest of us. But though he was no longer accessible, he began to leave shattering traces of himself..." (91). Obioma parallels Ikenna's behaviour to Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, where Gregor wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a gigantic vermin. He undergoes physical and psychological changes that are traumatic leading to his death. Gregor attempts to come to terms with his new condition and takes a psychological and physical journey from his room where he was trapped by trying to access his family in other rooms. This leads to alienation and neglect by his family and leads to his death. Ikenna, like Samsa, also takes a similar journey that leads to his death through a confrontation with his brother Boja. The narrator writes "And then, after a little pause, we heard the opening and closing of the sitting room's storm door, too. We had not seen Ikenna in two days because he'd hardly at home..." (92). Ikenna, in this extract, is depicted as self-alienated and a wanderer. The narrator, however, does not reveal where Ikenna had been visiting while he was away. Lango in his M.A

thesis likens Ikenna's journeys to Cain wandering in the biblical story of Cain and Abel. He argues that Obioma's allusion to the biblical story; "Shows that man is born with a propensity to violence and aggression and, like Ikenna once violence is triggered it is unstotaple" (38). Although Lango appreciates the journeys that define Ikenna's character, he fails to appreciate the bigger picture illuminated by these journeys. Ikenna is not only attempting to escape from the madman's prophecy but is also attempting to solidify his domination against his brothers. Mbembe on *Postcolonial* argues that with regard to governing postcolonial states two factors emerge; first is the dealing of human behaviour and how it constitutes to strength and domination of the state. Second is the lack of knowledge of governance by the leaders due to inherited colonial governments, which is a product of numerous cultures and heritage. Ikenna is symbolically a product of postcolonial state and his quest for domination against his brothers' illuminates the desire of post-colonial dictators to dominate their states. He is also a product of inherited culture from colonialism and his father who names him as the leader over his brothers. With little knowledge of governance, Ikenna is on the verge of collapse like many post-colonial African states.

Through Ikenna's numerous journeys, Obioma symbolically foregrounds Nigeria's dictators' journey towards their demise that is reinforced by Achebe's assertions that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmarks of true leadership (1).

Achebe, through repetitions of words 'there is nothing wrong' with the Nigeria character, the Nigerian land, climate, water or air arouses readers to question the source of the problem in postcolonial Nigeria. However, Achebe reveals that the problem in Nigeria squarely lies with the leadership of the country. He accuses Nigerian leaders for their failure to rise and guide the

nation on the right path. Achebe asserts that Nigeria, from independence, had been on a wrong journey. Obioma goes further and reveals the wrong journey Nigeria had taken from independence. Nigerian leaders like Agwu use destructive leadership styles, which have created cracks in Nigeria as a nation. Negative ethnicity, tribalism and sectarian politics have made it difficult for the country to develop, which have created disillusionment as depicted in the text. Ikenna's physical journeys, therefore, represents his own journey towards self-destruction rather than self-discovery. The failure of Ikenna to learn also symbolizes the failure of postcolonial leaders in Nigeria as per Achebe's arguments.

3.7 Finding Self

Obembe and Benjamin are depicted as taking various physical journeys in the novel. Despite them being depicted in different images to concretise the symbolic representations as argued in Chapter one, their journeys are meant to save their family from the woes they undergo after the madman's prophecy. These journeys take them to rediscover their strength and identity of their family and, therefore, the need to fight and protect it. At the start of the novel, the two young brothers are depicted as followers and naïve observers of their older brothers, Ikenna and Boja.

Ben writes:

Before we slept that night, Ikenna who was nearly fifteen and on whom we relied for interpretation of most things... Boja, a year his junior, who would have felt unwise if he did not have any idea about the situation, had said it must be that Father was traveling abroad to a "Western world" just as we often feared he someday would. (13)

Obembe and Ben naivety made them subjects of their brother's domination physically and psychologically. They accompany them without giving their voice even when they feel things are not right. They follow their brothers to the village grounds where street boys attack them. When their brothers suggest they become fishermen, they do not show any signs of resistance. However, things begin to change when Ikenna starts alienating himself from them. Obembe starts questioning and searching for answers on his own through reading. He also teaches Ben

to question things through stories he told him. He trains him to question and become self-conscious.

Obembe's and Ben's physical journey allude to Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Ben writes:

Before our brothers died, he (Obembe) told me the story of a princess who followed a perfect gentleman of great beauty to the heart of a forest insisting she'd marry him only to discover the man was merely a skull who'd borrowed the fresh and body parts of others. That story, as all good stories planted a seed in my soul and never left me (275)

The story is significant to Ben who declares that as a good story it planted a seed in the soul that never left him. The two like the naive young princess who blindly followed a "perfect gentleman" into the forest and discovered later that he was just a skull in borrowed fresh, followed their brothers blindly and discovered late that they had taken a dangerous journey that caused the family trauma. In order to revenge their brothers, Obembe tells Ben that they need to take a different journey rather than the one taken by their brothers. Obembe narrates to Ben a story he had read in a book whose title he couldn't recall. The story was about a strong man called Okonkwo who was reduced to commit suicide by a white man. Obembe believes that Umofia were oppressed because they lacked unity (276). Alluding to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* Obembe urges Ben to get united and solve their family mystery. In doing so, they would take a journey outside their hiding spaces and mourning to the streets, find Abulu, and destroy him. Although these sentiments can be understood at this literal level, it also symbolically represents the quest of unity amongst various tribes in Nigeria to find a lasting solution. They need to come together and fight poor leadership and negative perception created by colonialism.

Obembe and Ben take a physical journey when they kill Abulu. They plan to escape the fury of the army and the state for killing Abulu. Obembe makes an escape to Benin but Ben refuses to join him. He is arrested and jailed for eight years. While in jail, he undergoes a total

transformation. He develops a different perception of the world and when he is released, Ben writes, “It was as though everything had become new, as though the world itself had been born again” (405). Ben realization of the working of the world around him enables him to have an overview of life in totality. Him seeing everything he knew as new is a way of self-reflection and realization within the environment (social, spiritual, politically, economically and so on) thus being a journey of self-discovery which changes not on his perception but also life’s experiences. During the eight years in jail he realises Nigeria does not change, the state of disillusionment and poverty continued to escalate creating a deeper valley between haves and have-nots.

The jailing of Ben and the escape of Obembe to Benin foregrounds the journey of the two brothers toward self-realisation. Their journey is brought out clearly at the end of the novel when we are made to see the reunion of the two brothers and their different acquired images during their times away. Ben says, “For a moment, I stood still as his form began to move towards me. My heart leapt like a free bird at the thought that t was him, my veritable brother, that had now appeared as real as he once was, like an egret after my storm” (409). Ben after seeing Obembe says he felt like a free bird. The author deploys simile here to give the reader a mental image of happiness. The happiness is part of shedding away their lost memories and death of their brother in the hands of a madman. Therefore, their journey had made them free and conscious in avenging the deaths of their brothers Ikenna and Boja.

3.8. Psychological and Emotional Journeys: Rediscovering the Lost Hope

3.8.1 Exposing Neo-colonialism in the Post-Colonial States

In the narrative, we come across dreams of various characters as a journey that brings out issues that affect Agwu family and that of postcolonial Nigeria as well as most of the postcolonial African states. The dreams of the mother after Ikenna and Boja fight prophesy their death. The narrator writes, “Throughout the rest of the day, Mother was a mined road that exploded when

anyone stepped within an inch of her” (180). The author uses a metaphor of mind to describe the mother’s emotional status to learn her children’s hatred of each other. The mother is affected psychologically as well and she blames the father for the unfortunate happenings in the family. She complains that she had asked the father to ask for a transfer back to Akure or take the four boys with him to Yola. The four brothers have turned into a menace and their mother’s inability to control them symbolically represents the Nigeria nation’s failure to unite its many different tribes. The shaky unity of Nigeria as a nation is allegory presented here to examine critically what ails the nation.

The mother’s dreams are presented in premonitions and psychological breakdowns. The author’s essence is to capture the readers’ attention and foreground the tensions, which exist in post-colonial Nigeria. After the death of Ikenna and Boja, the mother starts complaining of being attacked by spiders and seeing Boja’s image during the night in the house. “Spiders built temporary shelters and nested in our home... but they took their invasion a step further and invaded our mother’s mind.” (248). The image of spiders is symbolic of the chaotic emotions that the mother undergoes. The author uses it to reflect on the confusion that rages on the mother’s mind increasing suspense in the text. It also foregrounds the mother’s love for her children and the suffering she faces when things go wrong with them. Through these emotional breakdowns, the writer symbolically directs the reader to the causes of disillusionment in the Nigerian society. First, the failure of the leadership as envisaged by Achebe’s *The Problem with Nigeria*, in *The Fishermen* the father leaves the four boys and tragedy visits the family. Second, the animosity of various tribes in Nigeria symbolised by Ikenna and Boja’s rivalry, which has affected the national identity of Nigeria and destroyed the peaceful coexistence between the various ethnic groups in the country.

The psychological journey motif in narrative is also achieved through the bildungsroman in the text. Charles Nnolin defines bildungsroman as; “A novel in which a hero goes through a process

of education and maturation, beginning as he goes from ignorance of or perceptions about himself, and ends up more knowledgeable about himself and the nature of the world” (182). Therefore, a bildungsroman novel entails a character (child) undergoing a maturation process—physically and psychologically. According to Nnolin the maturation of the character offers knowledge of the world hence changing the character’s perceptions. The story reveals the growth of a child as the plot develops giving the novel a deeper meaning. Gichohi argues that a bildungsroman “relies on the growth of a child in all spheres of his or her life—physical, biological, social mental, spiritual—from childhood to adulthood” (82). Bildungsroman novel may concentrate with a character taking physical journey in land or water and in the process come across lessons, which shapes his knowledge. The character learns lessons about himself or humanity. Therefore, the journey can be either spatial or temporal. The spatial journey sees a character undertaking a journey from one place to another while the temporal journey is more of metaphorical journey. *The Fishermen* can be read at both levels. However, in this study, the emphasis lies on the metaphorical journey since the four brothers (Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Ben) development in the novel lies on physiological journey that depict their social environment and their growth toward awareness. Their growth also represents the growth of the ideology and psychological maturation of their personalities. In addition, their growth parallels the growth of Nigeria as a nation.

In *The Fishermen*, the bildungsroman aspect of the novel is presented in the point of view of a seven-year boy, Ben. The narration of the novel depends on Ben’s perspective, which informs the development of the novel to the end when he comes out of jail in his twenties. Although the point of view interchanges with his adult point of view it does not digress too much in what Habila points out that the story is told in present narrative voice and as a recollection of events in Ben’s perspective. Habila further argues that the balance “between childhood action and adult memory gives the book a directness and guilelessness that is essential to its success”

(Habla). It is through a child's point of view that Obioma narrates actions and incidences that reflect social, political and economic realities of postcolonial Nigeria in the 1990s. These realities also shape the narrator's identity.

The tenet of the bildungsroman that *The Fishermen* rely on is the ability of Ben (the child narrator) to recount the events and telling them seamlessly. Jennifer Muchiri in her M.A thesis; "Caribbean Literature; Postcolonial Literature; Narrative Techniques" emphasizes that, "Children have receptive minds, are sincere to reality and will not strive to distort what they observe" (19). The inability of the child to alter facts gives a genuine representation of society giving a true image of issues affecting society. This accounts for the truthful representation of the realities of postcolonial Nigeria that the author wants us to interrogate and question.

Obioma uses the child narrator to focus on various issues that have put the Agwu family on a trajectory of demise and as well focus on issues that have continued to ravage the post-colonial Nigeria. The child's innocence foregrounds the social disorder in the Nigerian community as well as the identity crisis in post-colonial Nigeria. The naivety of the child narrator is presented through Ben's obsession with animal images and symbols. Ben 'likens' everything with an animal he has interacted with or heard of in folktales. For instance, he accords all the other major characters an animal's name, the father is an eagle, the mother is likened to a wet mouse, Boja is a dangerous fungus and Obembe is a search dog due to his over consciousness.

The child narrator symbolizes the theme of naivety and innocence that Obioma uses to project the disillusionment that characterized the Nigerian society in the 1990s and to portray colonialism as the cause of Nigeria's problems. We first encounter Ben and his three brothers in the novel when he is nine years old "Obembe who, at eleven was two years my senior..." (13). Obioma presents the naivety of the child by presenting Ben's inability to comprehend what is happening within his home. When the father comes home with a transfer letter and it causes tension in the family, he narrates "...Mother emerged a different being. She'd acquired

the gait of a wet mouse, averting her eyes as she went about the house. She did not go to church that day, but stayed home and washed a stack of Father's clothes, wearing an impenetrable gloom on her face" (12). Ben makes observations of his mother's emotion and likens them to a "wet mouse." He is naïve and cannot connect the reason behind his mother's sadness. It is through Ben that we learn that the mother is worried about their father's leaving his teenage boys for a "dangerous" town of Yola. He also tells us about the father's departure and how his older brothers started adventuring outside the home in a freer way. Although Ben does not know, he represents the tensions that exist between Nigeria's northerners and southerners.

However, Ben's maturity is gradual as seen at the end of the novel when he is about twenty-three years old. Through the novel, he matures to a twenty-three years old man. His experiences, thoughts and perspectives are, therefore, of a child. However, as the novel progresses, we see Ben gradually developing into a more conscious and inquisitive adult. He interrogates Obembe's plans to kill Abulu and providing more plans that are realistic. He interrogates his father's actions and behaviours. When the father disappears a few days after the death of Ikenna and Boja, he returns with a bandaged eye. He alleges that he developed a cataract and surgery was conducted, the explanation does not add up prompting Ben to investigate. Ben discovers that the father was lying and Abulu injured him while he was attempting to kill him to avenge Boja and Ikenna's death. The revelation changes Ben's thinking about life and he becomes more conscious of his environment. Ben not only exhibits maturity growth, but also a self-awareness growth, which is well articulated at the end of the novel when Ben joins his brother, Obembe, to kill Abulu in avenging their brothers Ikenna and Boja's deaths.

Monica Mweseli observes that the first person narrative is a key device to foreground journey motif. She observes that the first person narrative is powerful because instead of getting second information from the author "the narrator vividly tells the readers of his journey..." (359). According to Mweseli, the first person narrative accords the narrator an opportunity to narrate

his world in his/her perspective hence vividly expressing the characters' emotions. In addition, the narrator provides a detailed history of his/her experiences. She further notes that in a journey motif, the narrating voice functions in the long-established tradition of the 'Bildungsroman'. That is a young person encounters varied experiences and each of the narrated stories contributes to character awareness. Mweseli's observation is key to this study as the characters undergo various journeys, which symbolically contribute to their consciousness and awareness. Habila in the novel review notes that *The Fishermen* works at many levels "It is an obvious Bildungsroman: the moment the father leaves home ... the Agwu brothers are thrust into a harsh world which they have to cope..." (Habila). Therefore, the bildungsroman level in the novel is contributed by the journey the four brothers undertake to discover who they are.

In *The Fishermen*, the use of the first narrative voice helps the author to reveal what undergoes in the narrator's mind during the various journeys he undertakes. This creates credibility of events to the reader. However, it also limits him in revealing other characters' traits in a more vivid manner. For example, in the text, the reader grapples with imaginations of what undergoes through various characters' minds as they are described. When the narrator conveys the tension that exists between the mother and father, the reader wonders of the mother's thoughts and feelings despite being told she was aggrieved. This strategy of characterization denies the reader to empathize and relate to the mother's feeling directly provoking a feeling of it being just a story told. "By Sunday morning mother emerged a different being. She'd acquired the gait of a wet mouse, averting her eyes as she went about the house" (11). The evidence of the mother's anger here is seen rather than demonstrated. This weakens the novel's gravity on the narration of problems afflicting the family. It makes the reader not feel the force the author wants to impart. For example, we are shown the tension and shaky relationship between Ikenna and Boja without much emphasis on their inner reaction to the situation. This denies the reader a glimpse to understand the pain that underlies between Boja and Ikenna. However, when the author

demonstrates character traits through actions and speech the effect is different to the reader. “What are you doing you fool!” Boja cried. “There is a riot; they are killing people, let’s go home!” (167). Here Boja appears hostile but also caring. He condemns his brother’s stubbornness and demonstrates leadership. In this scene, the trait is demonstrated rather than stated.

Although the author relies mostly on direct characterization, there is an instance where he does not state the traits directly. He relies on suggestive and hidden indicators within the text, which is merely alluded to. He lets the reader infer and interpret these hidden indicators, which show or display the characters’ traits. These include dialogues, speeches, actions, external appearance and the environment. This is done to enhance the reader’s perception of the character trait revealed.

The Father’s pompous command in the English language stuns the young narrator who admires him:

So, they first talked about tangential matters: Father’s job; his view about the depletion of the naira under the “rotten polity that is this current administration.” Although my brothers and I had always wished we knew the kind of vocabulary Father knew, there were times when we resented it... (45).

The father’s command of the English language reveals that he is a ‘well-educated’ man and westernized. Ironically, it projects how far the father is alienated from his family and society. It is through his speech that we learn what goes on in his mind and the perceptions of Nigeria. Although the father is well educated. He is applying violence to oppress and dominate over his family. He alienates and marginalises the boys by denying them a space to interact freely with their neighbours. The author gives a direct quote of the father’s speech to make the reader see the image of the father indirectly. This is a forceful method of characterization as it makes the reader attentive and learns the inner feelings and traits of a character.

However, at the end of the novel, the father's attitude and character change drastically. After the death of Ikenna and Boja, the father begins a journey to self-realization. Moreover, when Obembe confronts him to explain the strange substance in a jar tagged Boja Agwu (1982-1996) he confesses it is Boja's ashes. It dawns to the children that Boja was cremated. Furthermore, he reveals that he and his wife are warned strictly by his clansmen and relatives not to bury Boja in a respectful manner because the gods of the culture demand no one who commits fratricide should be buried (273). The father, by agreeing with these cultural demands, depicts his departure towards self-realization. His self-realisation is a major step in the family in solving their problems. He realises his mistakes, which may have led to the tragedy and he starts the journey of healing past wounds. This is seen when he confesses to Ben his attempt to kill Abulu to avenge Ikenna and Boja. At the court, he gives Ben hope by encouraging him not to feel guilty as his act is an honour to the family.

“This is not the time for this Ben,” he whispered once we got there. “There isn't— “

“I know, Daddy, I'm only sad for Mama,” I replied.

Please tell her we're sorry.”

“No, Azikiwe, listen,” he said. “You will go there like I've trained you to be. You will go like the man you were when you took up arms to avenge your brothers.” A tear drooped down his nose as he carved the invisible torso of a huge man with his hands.

“You will tell them how it all happened, you will say it all like the man I brought you up to be- menacing, juggernauts” (410).

In this dialogue, the reader is made to perceive a different and remorseful father. The author aims to draw the reader's attention to the father's realization of his problem and appreciation of Ben and Obembe's actions to avenge their brothers. This reveals a transformed man who is no longer obsessed with 'western' perspectives and perceptions. The departure is important as we meet a responsible father who does not use violence and threats to his family but encourages them.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter notes that the physical, psychological and emotional journeys have been used in the text to depict and expose the realities in post-colonial Nigeria as well as many other post-colonial African states. Through the physical journey, the author presents the main characters in the text undertaking various movements from where they first lived to newer spaces in an attempt to rediscover themselves. The physical journey is also deployed to foreground thematic concerns the author wants to emphasize to the reader. The father's relocation from Akure to the northern town of Yola exposes Nigeria as the soft underbelly of negative tribalism. It also exposes the problems created by colonialism where various tribes, without any cultural unification, were forced together to form a nation. The physical journey is also instrumental to the four brothers who undertake an adventurous journey outside their home to rediscover themselves. Their father had brainwashed them with western ideologies, which alienated them from their society. At the end of the journey, we notice that Obembe and Ben are no longer the same naïve and reliant on their father and older brothers to make judgments. They kill Abulu, the mad man, for causing their family untold sufferings. The father also emerges as a different man who no longer glorifies westernization and uses violence to drive his agendas. The physical journey helps to break barriers to self-realization.

The psychological and emotional journeys have been used to reflect the turmoil of the family as a microcosm of an African state under colonialism. Through dreams and mental status of various characters, the author successfully exposes the setback post-colonial Nigeria and most of the postcolonial African states face due to colonialism. It also exposes the defragmentation of societies in Nigeria through tribal politics and sectarian tensions. This has been the major undoing many post-colonial African states as Achebe argues in his essay, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Through physical, emotional and psychological journeys, the author not only reveals an African state rediscovering herself but also offering hopes of success through fighting colonial influence.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have interrogated the use of animal imagery and symbols in Obioma's *The Fishermen*. The driving concept has been that the author seeks to symbolise Nigeria state and most other African postcolonial states that are riddled with ethnicity, tribalism, corruption and violence that has led its citizens disillusioned. The imagery and animal symbols used reveals the underlying animosity amongst various tribes and communities in Nigeria. However, the author seeks to unearth the underlying problem and expose colonialism as the onset of destabilized communities in Nigeria. The novel is about a destabilized family torn between sibling rivalries that exacerbate to infanticide. The key idea Obioma drives to the reader's imagination is to draw a vivid imagination and bring to consciousness the ills committed by colonialization and poor leadership that has galloped post-independence states to a state of violence and anarchy. It emphasizes the disillusionment that has resulted in defragmentation of the state into tribal and sectarian structures, furthering Nigeria's problem.

Through the Father, Mother, Ikenna, Boja, Obembe and Ben, Obioma displays the real image of Nigeria's political wrangles and it affects the societies. Through Ikenna and Boja's unending fights the novel suggests the unending ethnicity and tribalism in Nigeria. However, through Obembe and Ben the novel suggests hope to the nation as the two young boys struggle to find a solution to the causes of the family defragmentation. Obembe is keen to study the historical background of his society through literary texts. He also goes ahead and avenges his brother through plans he gets from texts he reads. The author suggests the importance of education in solving Nigeria's problems.

For Obioma, the problems facing Nigeria are not their making but inherited from colonialism. He accuses the 'madman' of his prophecies that tears the two brothers apart. The disintegration and defragmentation of various tribes in Nigeria is dramatized in a family tragedy. The children keen to adventure at Omi-Ala is a response to understand their environment and history.

Through the young narrator, we realize that the vision for the Nigerian society is to find solutions to problems that have over the years torn the country into hopelessness. The animal symbols implicitly critic Nigeria's leadership and power struggles amongst the four major tribes.

Additionally, the journey motif and emblems act as ways of reflection of self is also taken by the narrator to us the readers who embark together with the characters as we read. The narrator, through the writer, engages us into an additional journey of reflection and introspect not only on the short fallings of the fictional characters but also our own. By so doing the purgation of the ails and ills of the characters are understood from an oneiric in understanding the fictional characters. This goes on a step further where we as the readers can purgate our falling by the reflection of the fictional characters. By looking at the imagery and the symbolism in *The Fishermen*, Obioma invites us to defamiliarise the old and understand the standing of not only Nigeria but our countries and continents as well. This is an invite to not just personal journey but communal, national, regional as well as continental. This invitation is a journey of space as well as time from the pre-colonial to the colonial, independence and post- post-independence.

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