

Beyond the Flesh: Representations of Corporeality in Anglophone Nigerian Novels of the 21st Century

In her speech delivered at the 2009 TEDGlobal conference, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie emphasizes that whenever we view the world through the lens of a single story, we limit our understanding of reality and the complexity of the human experience. Given the current social and environmental issues, such as oil spills, food crises, gender inequality, and the vulnerable state of the LGBTQ+ community in Nigeria, the voices of Nigerian writers play a crucial role in shaping the lived experiences of their society, and for that reason, the multiplicity of their stories should not be neglected in academic discourse.

The aim of this project is to explore representations of embodiment in 21st-century Anglophone Nigerian literature and how these literary depictions challenge anthropocentric perceptions of the human body. I propose the following research hypotheses: (1) the selected literary texts challenge traditional notions of the human body as a fixed and stable entity, emphasizing fluidity, interconnectedness, and transformative potential; (2) the selected prose of Nigerian writers reflects cultural, social and technological changes, presenting the body as transcending traditional gender and identity boundaries. This raises the following research questions:

1. How do contemporary Anglophone Nigerian literary texts represent embodiment, particularly in terms of fluidity, interconnectedness, and transformative potential?
2. What is the role of non-human beings, including animals, spirits, and other forms of non-human agency, in 21st-century Nigerian literature, and how do these representations challenge traditional anthropocentric notions of the body?
3. How do cultural, social, and technological changes shape representations of the body in selected literary texts?
4. What are the key themes, motifs, and literary techniques used in the selected texts to represent the body as transcending material existence?
5. What is the significance of the representations of embodiment in the works under discussion, particularly in relation to non-human beings, the environment, and the inclusivity and diversity of identities?

The literary corpus established so far includes novels such as: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) by Lola Shoneyin, *Tomorrow I Become a Woman* (2022) by Aiwano Odafe, *The Icarus Girl* (2005) by Helen Oyeyemi, *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi, *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) by Chinelo Okparanta, *Butter, Honey, Pig, Bread* (2020) by Francesca Ekwuyasi, *Lagoon* (2014) by Nnedi Okorafor, and *War Girls* (2019) by Tochi Onyebuchi.

The chosen methodology draws from postcolonial studies, new materialism, ecocriticism, posthumanism, gender studies, and queer discourses. Furthermore, it combines Western methods of literary analysis with perspectives formulated by African literary critics. Such an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research method will allow for the most adequate and comprehensive analysis of the indicated subject matter. What is more, a comparative perspective will help to identify similarities and differences in embodied experiences under discussion. The results of the research will be disseminated in the form of conference papers and articles in English published in prestigious international journals.