‘If the Sun Refuses to Rise, We Will Make it Rise’: Queer Migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *GraceLand* (2004)

By

Lauren C. Adler

English Literature, University of Colorado Boulder

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Thesis Advisor: Laura Winkiel, English Literature

Defense Committee:

Laura Winkiel, English Literature

Maria Windell, English Literature (Honors Counsel Representative)

Kristie Soares, Women & Gender Studies

Cheryl Higashida, English Literature
Amidst the passing of the DREAM Act, a seemingly liberal and progressive naturalization law that would extend permanent residency to undocumented youth who met a series of conditions, Julio Salgado and the rest of the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP) leaders vocalized their discontent with the exclusionary law through a series of ‘I Am Undocuqueer posters.’

Because the conditions for naturalization are rooted in exclusionary expectations that have classist, heteronormative, ableist, racialized overtones that only allow for

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1 The DREAM Act applies to those who “arrived in the United States prior to the age of sixteen, lived in the United States for at least five consecutive years prior to the act’s approval, possesses a clean criminal record and thus good moral standing, graduated from high school or obtaining a GED, attended two years of college or serving in the military within six years of the act’s authorization, and being between the ages of twelve and thirty-five at the time of the act’s enactment” (Chávez 80).
a select few to be able to claim U.S. citizenship, this act inadvertently encourages those who do not meet these standards to remain silent for their own protection and safety.

Queer post-structuralist theorists like Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembé would expect this outcome as they argue that because repression is inextricably tied to power, knowledge, sexuality, and in this case migration, agency and autonomy are not feasible (Foucault 139). In other words, they contend that agency and autonomy are confined by the biopolitical and necropolitical state, which for the purposes of this thesis can be defined as “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (Mbembé 14). For these renown scholars, suppression of citizenship status and sexuality, or any other form of agency or autonomy for that matter, is to be expected given the power of the state, however, Salgado and his QUIP colleagues show that biopolitical and necropolitical state repression does not negate agency as much as post-structuralist scholarship implies, but rather, gives rise to liminal modes of agency.

Although the ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ series was a brief movement lasting a couple of years and was mainly confined to migrant activist communities around the Bay Area, Salgado’s hometown, the declaration of a coalitional political identity is a commonality among all of the posters. As exemplified in figure one, the colorful, vibrant cartoon-themed posters are warm, inviting, and non-threatening, allowing for a viewer to be visually enticed regardless of the meaning behind it. The visual aesthetics are contrasted by a series of rejections, embellishing the supposedly deviant and non-normative undocumented and queer identities and refusing to be marginalized or exploited by the DREAM Act. The reclamation of liminality through an aesthetic artform becomes a “promising space for the vibrant, colorful and festive celebration of new political subjectivities that have the potential to simultaneously challenge the vulnerabilities
produced through grids of sexuality and gender normativity and the violences of detention and deportation” (White 990). Thus, the “I Am Undocuqueer” series is contemporary, material proof that agency and autonomy are possible amidst biopolitical and necropolitical state authorized practices that supposedly prevent or rid of it.

Preface to Queer Migration

While I appreciate Foucault and Mbembé’s post-structural commentary on the inextricable link between state-authoritative control over life/death mechanisms and an individual’s positionality, I find it troubling to entirely rid of agency and autonomy as it reduces one to a social death, that is rid of their ability to resist the mechanisms that are imposed onto them. Although I recognize that the absent conversation around agency and autonomy is an intentional tactic used to showcase the oppressive power of the state, I am not ready to succumb to the pessimistic possibility that the state is imbued into everything that we do and every facet of who we are. The ‘I Am Undocuqueer’ series shows us that agency and autonomy are intersectionally subjective and possible, meaning that granted naturalization might be sanctionally and symbolically freeing for one group of undocumented people, but embracing one’s liminal undocumented and queer status as a form of counter-hegemonic resistance is a form of autonomy for another. Continuing the resistive legacy of the series but applying it to the literary field, I argue that migration under the conditions of war is queer, specifically as it pertains to the Afro-diasporic novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *GraceLand* (2004) by Chris Abani. While I plan on flushing out how I define queer

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2 Drawing from Orlando Patterson and Lisa Marie Cacho, I define social death as a liminal social and political condition where one is described in terms of their unbelonging or disposability, “the margin between community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular,” (Patterson 51). To rephrase, one is described in terms of their hauntology, there but not entirely. The most common example are slaves as they are physically alive, but stripped of their basic human rights, however, the exemplification of social death has been applied to many populations that do not align with the traditional white, Christian, heteronormative narrative.
migration in more depth in each of the chapters themselves, it can be prefaced as the intersection between migratory and affectual collective practices. Given that social death is a consequence of necropolitical regimes and that queer identifying people have a different relationship to time compared to their heterosexual counterparts, I argue that queer migration involves embracing one’s migratory, typographical liminality and temporarily using it as a counter-hegemonic act of resistance against the hypermasculine, non-affectual, stark militaristic implications of war. I will begin each chapter by contextualizing the Biafran War (1967-1970) and its lingering effects, and will discuss how queer migration arises out of it by applying it to each of the Afro-diasporic novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *GraceLand* (2004). Ultimately, by arguing that migration is queer, I hope to show how this alternative facet of biopolitics and necropolitics turns to the ways in which individual and collective agency are possible and should be surfaced, even after a war seizes to impose destructive practices or death.
Chapter One: Queer Migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)

Introduction

In order to understand the ethnopolitical nature of the Biafran War, one needs to understand the stakes behind colonized Nigeria. In the late 15th century, Pope John II gave the people of San Tomé the right to trade with Benin Empire. Suffering from a labor shortage, Benin found it profitable to supply slaves to San Tomé as they would receive twice the amount of gold in return (Gould 13). This seemingly direct exchange began to seep into the exportation of people to the Americas, then the Caribbean, and finally the north; it was not until the slave trade was abolished nearly three hundred years later that the commodification of bodies transitioned into the palm oil trade between primarily British traders and the indigenous Igbo population (Gould 13). As with most colonized trade regimes, Southern Nigeria was faced with the forced implementation of Eurocentric culture, including but not limited to, western education, mandatory usage of the English language, and involuntary Christian ideologies and practices. Sir Frederick Lugard, the high commissioner for Northern Nigeria, fostered a policy of indirect rule, so rather than be forced to assimilate to Eurocentric culture like the South, Northern Nigerians were able to maintain their own cultural discourses and practices; This intranational divide between colonized cultural practices in the North and in the South was the first indication of intertribal ethnic competitiveness, which only heightened after Nigeria became an independent country (Gould 25).

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria was granted independence from Britain after the independence drive, a coalition of conservative government officials, trade unions, veterans, etc. fought for independent Nigeria during the end of World War II (SAHO). While this might have

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3 San Tomé is a Central African Island near the equator while the Benin Empire was a pre-colonial kingdom in what is currently southern Nigeria.
seemed like an immediate success, Nigeria was met with the ramifications of colonialism including economic and financial troubles, political strife, and most importantly, ethnic competitiveness. In other words, after its’ independence from Great Britain, Nigeria was informally divided up into three symbolic geographic regions: the west, controlled by the Yoruba, the east, led by the Igbo, and the north, headed by the Hausa-Fulani: “Northerners had historically failed to embrace western ideologies…[which] created the catalyst for the East to secede from the federation in order to create an independent state [called Biafra]…Because the South had readily absorbed western ideology…this meant that much of the economic and administrative life of the North was controlled by people from the South” (Gould 2-3). In other words, the implications of colonialism left a stain on Nigeria’s power dynamics, resulting in a complicated web of economic and political strife. On May 30, 1967, “the seceded state of Biafra [declared] war as a war of survival in order to gain permanent sovereignty, whereas the rest of Nigeria was solely intent on getting the renegade state to return to the federation” (Gould 3).

Although interstate conflict was a central component, alliances formed beyond Nigeria, adding to the politicized nature of the war itself. For example, Russia supplied guns and weaponry to the Federal Authorities while France provided arms support to Biafra (Gould 6, 148). Although the war only lasted approximately two and a half years, the civil war caused an innumerable amount of atrocities such as 50,000 direct fatalities and anywhere from 500,000 to six million fatalities from famine (Mass Atrocity Endings). Based on these statistics alone, it is evident that this war has had lasting intergenerational, socioeconomic, and political impacts on remaking of Nigeria.

On December 24, 1969, Biafra capitulated due to “extreme privation, leading to mounting malnutrition, disease, illness and death; diminishing land space, which caused severe reductions in food and other resources, and homelessness and increasing numbers of refuges, and
mounting military opposition” (Gould 111). After Colonel and republic leader Ojukwu surrendered and fled Nigeria, the Biafrans were forced to reintegrate into Nigerian society while succumbing to a plethora of post-civil war ramifications including socioeconomic turmoil, personal loss, and the collapsing of a Biafran nationalistic identity. Although there was an oil boom right after the war that allowed for the Nigerian federal government to reestablish power and for the economy to begin to restabilize, it is evident that the civil war resulted in a lot of physical and symbolic damage that has had lasting impacts on Nigeria today; renown writer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie meditates on these lingering effects in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

Set during the Biafran War (1967-1970), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) bounces back and forth between the novel’s protagonists Professor Odenigbo, his servant Ugwu, his wife Olanna, his sister-in-law Kainene, and his intellectual friend Richard as they navigate the devastating ramifications of post-colonial independence. The novel begins with pre-war context such as Ugwu becoming a servant to survive capitalist Nsukka, Odenigbo’s radical Pan-Igboism beliefs as a preface to his later Biafran leadership role, Olanna’s wealthy and successful upbringing as a successful professor from Kano, and British Richard’s obsession with Olanna’s sister, Kainene. After setting up the ever-present class division, the novel quickly shifts to the war itself, highlighting the biopolitical and necropolitical reality these characters were directly and indirectly subject to. These themes include the death of Olanna’s extended family, Odenigbo’s mother, Ugwu’s mother and girlfriend Eberechi, etc., the power of the state to recruit militaristic nationals, evident by Ugwu being forced to serve for the military, and erasure. The book abruptly ends with Kainene’s disappearance as she insists upon trading upon enemy lines; mourning the loss of her sister, Olanna and her family migrate back to Nsukka where the novel begins.
Written and published around the time she received the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University in 2006, Adichie wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) to commemorate her own familial legacy. Raised in Nsukka, Nigeria into an educated, middle to upper class family nearly a decade after the war, it might not seem like she directly experienced the devastating ramifications of the war, however, the murder of her grandparents in a refugee camp and her parents’ loss of everything they owned proved to ignite her novel: “I feel very strongly that there’s so much more that could have been done about Biafra that wasn’t done…I try very hard not to start off my writing with ideology. My aim is to simply tell the truth of Africa, of my experience as an African woman” (NPR). As implicit as it may seem, her more naturalist writing style have led some scholars like Daria Tunca to believe that she aims to resist the heteropatriarchy. For example, by resisting the parallelization between women and sentimentality, she powerfully sheds light on a genocidal event that has been buried under western neoliberal tactics⁴ (Tunca 115). Hailed as a “recreation of Nigerian history for didactic purposes,” her book was well received as scholars and readers alike applaud her attention to the devastating structural influences that shaped the formation of modern Nigeria today, however, little attention has been paid to the role of agency and autonomy in her novel (Kehinde 137). Regard for how the war shapes one’s ability to migrate or how it reinforces apathetic relationships, devoid of affect, have been completely ignored; in the next section, I hope to bridge the gap between the biopolitical and necropolitical state during war, migration, and affectual forms of agency by arguing that migration is queer in the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

**Queer Migration? Never Heard of Her**

⁴ I define “western neoliberal tactics” as a method of historical sous rature. In other words, I would argue that it is a way to claim transnational historical inclusivity, i.e. transcend the educational cannon and expose the role of the United States in colonial regimes, but in reality, it hides it behind a whitewashed interpretation.
The etymology of the term “liminality” comes from the Latin word, *limes*, roughly translating to “threshold”; as a physical or symbolic space, it implicates a boundary between two modes of subjecthood, usually between belonging and unbelonging (Thomassen 21, 24). As I briefly alluded to in the introduction, scholars like Lisa Marie Cacho have used the term interchangeably with social death: “the ineligibility to personhood…[and] the state of being legally recognized as rightless” (Cacho 7). In other words, liminality is defined in terms of what it is not: legally and informally belonging. Connoting a sense of absentia, it has long been used to exploit the lack of human rights afforded to slaves, migrants, and other marginalized groups, however, it is only recently that it has been redefined as a coalitional practice.

In an effort to combat the linkage between liminality and queer migrants, Karma Chávez argues that queer migration politics “is activism that seeks to challenge normative, inclusionary perspectives at the intersection of queer rights and justice and immigration rights and justice…[it] is a present vision and practice that is oriented toward others and a shared commitment to social and political change” (7). Unlike José Esteban Muñoz who takes an aesthetic, utopic approach to collectivity, Chávez turns to present, material forms of activism where those that are deemed liminal embrace and embody their status as a form of counter-hegemonic resistance. This means that rather than conform to the repressive meaning associated with liminality, they use it to temporarily defy being subjugated by the state. For example, take the “I Am Undocuqueer” series; rather than wallow in their intersectionally liminal status, they use it to promote visibility, to reclaim their existence in the face of a state that seeks to nullify it. Although it is temporary, Chávez effectively redefines liminality using rhetorical analysis and ethnographic interviews.
Expanding upon Chávez’s definition of queer migration politics by applying it to a literary context, I define queer migration as embracing one’s liminality amidst war-like conditions and temporarily using it as a form of counter-hegemonic resistance against the hypermasculine, apathetic, stark militaristic implications of war. As I will exemplify through the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) this includes physical or envisioned collective intimate and affectual bonds and heterogenous assemblages amongst other people who are deemed liminal. While Chávez takes a more relational approach by turning to the material present, I find Muñoz’s definition of queer futurity to be useful to my definition as I argue that queer migration does not necessarily have to be enacted in the present; rather, it can be a utopic vision that supersedes current repressive conditions of war. This futuristic element does not necessarily “risk turning too far from lived and everyday reality,” but instead, redefines liminality as an achievement rather than a autonomy-less label (Chávez 4).

In the next section, I plan exemplifying and complexifying my definition of queer migration through the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) to show that agency and autonomy are possible by embracing liminality as a mode of counter-hegemonic resistance; Chávez was able to effectively show that it is possible in the realm of ethnography and rhetoric, so it is time that it makes its way into the literary field.

**Interpersonal and Collective Queer Migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)**

Throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), the relationship between the two leading female protagonists, Olanna and Kainene Ozobia, fluctuates according to the stages of the war: the more destructive, the closer they become to one another. Born in Lagos, Nigeria under British colonial rule, the twin sisters grew up lavishly into an upper socioeconomic class due to their father’s chieftaincy. Not only were they able to attend a private primary school in Nigeria, but they
migrated to London, England to receive a more “proper,” colonial education (Adichie 45). While Olanna continues her parents’ high socioeconomic and cultural status legacy by earning her master’s degree in sociology at London University and teaches in Nsukka, Kainene begins to shy away from her parents “frequent deposits to [their daughters] bank accounts” by partaking in blue-collar, hypermasculine work as cement factory manager in the east (Adichie 131, 39).

Initially, nothing about their migration patterns seems liminal: Olanna uses her parents’ wealth and highly educated status to migrate out of Lagos and into Nsukka to become a sociology lecturer, while Kainene suffers the implications of detaching from her parents’ money by having to partake in manual labor. Consequently, it would only make sense that their relationship becomes distant, strained even due to shifting class dynamics amidst the rising tensions from the war.

As the Nigerian government and military forces begin to deterritorialize Biafra, Olanna and Kainene are forced to evacuate their homes in Nsukka and Port Harcourt and are urged to seek refuge in Orlu. Their parents offer to pay for Olanna and Kainene to immigrate with them to England so that they do not have to seek refuge: “‘Your father and I have finalized our plans. We have paid somebody who will take us to Cameroon and get us on a flight from there to London. We will use our Nigerian passports; the Cameroonians will not give us trouble. It was not easy, but it is done. We paid for four places’” (Adichie 236). Even though immigration is illegal during this phase of the war, the Ozobia’s opulent lifestyle essentially sanctions the unsanctioned, meaning that their lives are potentially spared due to the monetary value they hold. Upon receiving this offer, Kainene unsurprisingly declines her parents’ money and adheres to the state’s suggestion to seek refuge in Orlu, but Olanna is faced with a choice: to leave or not to leave. Based on her past financial dependency, it seems like she might immigrate to a more
stable country given that she had taken advantage of their monetary offers in the past when it came to funding her higher education career and residing at their lavish place in Lagos free of rent. Further, up until the war became physically destructive through genocidal tactics like mass starvation and killing sprees, Olanna was obsessed with material possessions like “her books, her piano, her clothes, her china, her wigs, her Singer sewing machine, the television…her tablecloths with the silver embroidery, her car, [and] Baby’s strawberry biscuits;” she even grieves these reoccurring tropes after the war takes them away, which solidifies the presumption that she would use her upper class socioeconomic status to her advantage as she could maintain these material possessions in a more stable elsewhere (Cooper 137).

While using one’s socioeconomic and social status to seek refuge in safer country seems normative, that is that it seems rational and justifiable to the reader, her decision to stay and fight for Biafra reveals her liminality between her biological family, her created family, the state, and their influence on her geographical residence. For example, when her parents offer for Olanna to migrate with them to England, she immediately responds with, “‘You know I won’t go…I’ll stay with Odenigbo and Baby. We’ll be fine…As soon as Nsukka is recovered, we’ll go back’” (Adichie 236). The tension between leaving with her parents or staying with her husband and daughter amidst a biopolitical and necropolitical regime puts Olanna in a position between two interpersonal forms of belonging, however, the implicit mention of the state complicates her positionality even further. On the one hand, it seems like alluding to the war hints disposability, her unbelonging as she is forced to make a choice between whether or not to immigrate, however, implying that the war will end while it is currently at its peak becomes futuristic. It shows that she is able to think beyond her liminality and envision a future that allows for her to stand with these structures rather than between them. This is furthered when she makes the
decision to become a school teacher after making the decision to stay in Biafra: “She taught them about the Biafran flag...[She] told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future” (Adichie 352). The physical act of collectively coming together to learn about the significance of Biafran independence in conjunction with envisioned liberation from the biopolitical and necropolitical state exemplifies Olanna’s ability to redefine her liminality as a method of counter-hegemonic resistance. She transcends her interpersonal and state liminality by embracing it through hyper-nationalistic tendencies. In other words, she becomes an extension of the state, not in the stark militaristic sense, but in that she collectively embodies and shares a unified Biafran cause. By doing so, Olanna’s decision to stay in Biafra when she has the socioeconomic and social means to migrate elsewhere exemplifies queer migration, even if she does not identify as so in the traditional sense.

To reiterate what I briefly contextualized earlier, Olanna and Kainene’s relationship becomes distant due to class differentials, however, it becomes further strained when Olanna has an affair with Kainene’s British lover, Richard Churchill after her own husband, Odenigbo, has an affair with his mother’s housemaid, Amala. After finding out about the affair in Nsukka, she is initially broken, “the weight of her chest too large...to fit her size” (Adichie 280). Interestingly enough, Olanna seems less concerned by the affair itself and more deceived by social implications of who Odenigbo chooses to have sex with: “What mattered to her was not what it meant but what had happened: his sleeping with his mother’s village girl” (Adichie 281). Given the ethnopolitical, classist tensions between Northern and Southern Nigeria during the war, it makes sense as to why she is more upset about her husband sleeping with someone of a different
tribal group and of a lower class than she, but it shows how her liminal positionality, stuck between her disposability as a wife and upper-class Biafran.

It is only when she migrates to Kano to mourn the deception with her cousin Arize and her Aunt Ifeka that she is empowered by her liminality rather than torn down by it as she is in the class and ethnicity hierarchical place of Nsukka. Aunt Ifeka encourages her to embrace her liminal position by “never behav[ing] as if your life belongs to a man,” so upon her return to Nsukka, she does exactly that: “She did not have to be the wounded woman whose man had slept with a village girl...She could be a women taking charge of her own life. She could be anything” (Adichie 283-284). The unbroken tone and blunt reclamation of her affectuality shows that she embraces and embodies her liminality and turns it into counter-hegemonic resistance against the apathetic reaction that the state and patriarchy seeks to implement. She envisions being any one she wants, regardless of gender roles, ethnicity, class, etc., which hints at a futuristic vision beyond state and gendered repression, but is solidified when she sleeps with Richard: “Everything changed when he was inside her. She raised her hips, moving with him, matching his thrusts, and it was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing herself with the loud, loud cries that burst out of her mouth” (Adichie 293). The juxtaposition between her broken, disposable subjecthood after finding out about the affair and her ability to sexually reclaim affectuality by embracing her liminality after migrating between Kano and Nsukka exemplifies counter-hegemonic resistance to both the state and patriarchy. By forefronting “sexual satisfaction as a therapy for pain...Adichie’s female characters’ agency is framed within their sexual autonomy as desiring subjects and agents” (Nwokocha 14). By making the choice to have sex with Richard, she chooses to take control of her liminality through a physical act that intimately resists the state’s biopolitical and necropolitical apathetic
expectations, and instead allows pleasure to occur, even if it is temporal. Again, although Olanna does not identify as queer and the sexual act itself is heteronormative, the act of embracing liminality by migrating to and from Nsukka allows Olanna to resist state patriarchal oppression, and bask in her ability to control her own affectuality.

In addition to Olanna’s refusal to immigrate despite her high socioeconomic status and her sexual affair with Richard, queer migration can be exemplified through the Biafran nationalist dinner parties that Olanna and Odenigbo hold primarily at their house in Nsukka, but ruminate about when the war becomes more destructive and invasive in Orlu. At these parties, intellectual radicals would meet in Nsukka from all over Nigeria, and would drink, laugh, listen to high life music and public radio announcements, give nationalistic poetry readings and talk about the rising tensions between what ends up becoming Biafra and the Nigerian central government and authoritative regimes (Adichie 138). These gatherings were a collective way to conspire and heal from the state “controlling [them] from behind drawn curtains” (Adichie 140). For example, due to the rising tensions between the newly formed Biafran state and Northern Nigeria, the succession of university classes was sanctioned by the government to supposedly protect these intellectuals, however, it ends up contributing to their liminality. Not only are they a slim percentage of those in Nigeria to begin with, but the succession rids them of a job and contributes to their erasure as a radical, anti-central government group (Adichie 202). They are deemed disposable along with the rest of Biafra.

With that said, these dinner parties were a collective way to embrace their geographic and social liminality. They become a homogenous assemblage of liminal subjects who collectively form a sense of Biafran nationalistic unity: “If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise...Clay pots fired in zeal, they will cool our feet as we climb” (Adichie 219, italics are from the original
In other words, their physical assemblage becomes interchangeable with their political mantra; by proudly embracing their unbelonging, they are able to create a sense of belonging among themselves, resisting their succession and erasure and projecting Biafran independence.

Unfortunately, as the war rages on, the dinner parties disband due to the stark militaristic regimes that rid of their ability to physically meet in person, however, Olanna and Odenigbo continue to envision these assemblages. While listening to a radio announcement that the Biafran military were taking out the vandals in Abakaliki, Olanna confronts Odenigbo and says, “‘Let’s have a party.’ ‘A party?’ [He asked]. ‘A small dinner party. You know, that’s what we had often in Nsukka.’ ‘This will be over soon, nkem, and we’ll have all the dinner parties in a free Biafra.’ She liked the way he said that, in a free Biafra, and she stood up and squashed her lips against his… [The] words suddenly took on a different meaning and she moved back and pulled her dress over her head in one fluid gesture” (Adichie 353-354). First and foremost, the parallelization between the thought of a dinner party and a vision of independent Biafra enlivens a sense of optimistic futurism. Rather than drown in the present necropolitical conditions that seek to devoid them of any hopeful thought, let alone a dinner party, Olanna envisions a collective practice that would allow them to radically convene and plot against the Nigerian authoritative forces. Although one could argue that it is only a thought, not a concrete practice, I would argue that it is the thought that leads to affective queer practice. Similar to her affair that she has with Richard, it is not the heterosexual sexual act itself that is queer, but the way that she is able to embrace her liminality and redefine it as an envisioned and affectual act of counter-hegemonic resistance.

Artistic and Aesthetic Exemplifications of Queer Migration in Half of a Yellow Sun (2006)
Olanna and Odenigbo’s Igbo houseboy, Ugwu, migrates from the small village, Opi, to work as a servant for the professor. Upon arrival, he is quickly taken into fatherly hands of Odenigbo who treats him more like a son than a houseboy. Not only does he mentor him in domestic skills like cooking and running errands, but he is insistent upon giving him an education to understand the tool of authoritative exploitation (Adichie 13). By reading the books that Odenigbo gives him and attentively listening in on the scholarly Biafran nationalistic debates during their dinner parties, Ugwu is placed in a liminal space between his new educationally rich lifestyle and his more traditional one in Opi. He is criticized by his immediate family and village for “forgetting where he came from,” and arguably becomes interchangeable with a specter after visiting his home after the war: “‘Are you real, Ugwu?’ [His father’s second wife] asked. ‘Are you real?’ She bent and grabbed handfuls of sand, throwing in rapid movements, and the sand fell on is shoulder, arms, belly. Finally, she stopped and hugged him” (Adichie 154, 524). The need for his step-mother to physically prove his presence by throwing sand onto his body shows that his liminality between two starkly different lifestyles had contributed to his sous rature, his erasure. He becomes a hauntological figure, a way for “abusive systems of power to make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with…or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied” (Gordon 2). In other words, Ugwu’s presence is defined in terms of his absence as his family has to physically prove that he is not a ghost. It shows the power of the state to dictate what is considered normative for a servant in the midst of war and what is not. Interestingly enough, it is when Ugwu embraces his spectral, liminal status at the end of the book that he counter-resists erasure by documenting the war in a personal historiography.
The World Was Silent When We Died, Ugwu’s novel, is a play on liminality. Not only is the book written anonymously until the end of the book when he dedicates it to his master, Odenigbo, but the way that the title directly calls out the lack of attention afforded to the devastating implications of the war indicates erasure and a sense of unbelonging within the master narrative of global atrocities (Adichie 541). On the surface, it seems like Ugwu conforms to his own liminality by directly implicating it through his book, however, I argue that his ability to physically document the Biafran conflict not only defies his own erasure, but resists the veiling of the genocidal war itself. Unlike Olanna who ends up “burning memory” by lighting her Biafran pounds on fire, an erasure of her Biafran nationalistic identity as monetary value can be interchangeable with state worth, Ugwu’s novel becomes a symbolic manifestation of the war, an object of documentality that follows him as he migrates all over Nigeria throughout the book (Adichie 539). Rather than succumb to his liminality, he embraces it by documenting his biopolitical and necropolitical reality; in doing so, he reinstates his ontology, foregoes his spectrality and thereby exemplifies the ways in which aesthetic modalities function as a queer migration as his book follows him through his migrations, but gives him an outlet to defy spectrality by documenting the written word.

Conclusion

Queer migration can be summarized as embracing liminality amidst war-like conditions and temporarily using it as a form of counter-hegemonic resistance against the hypermasculine, apathetic, stark militaristic implications of war. By analyzing Olanna’s choice to stay in Biafra regardless of her socioeconomic status and connections elsewhere, the affair between Olanna and Richard, Olanna and Odenigbo’s intellectual dinner parties, and Ugwu’s peritextual novel, I have exemplified queer migration to include physical or envisioned collective intimate, affectual
bonds, heterogenous assemblages amongst other people who are deemed liminal, and documenting spectrality. Unlike Foucault and Mbembé’s assertion that agency and autonomy are unfeasible due to the power of the biopolitical and necropolitical state, queer migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) shows us that the state does not negate agency as much as it claims to. Rather, agency and autonomy are a redefined as embracing and embellishing liminality. By making this argument, I do not mean to denounce the inhumane, oftentimes violent and deadly implications of the war, but I find it important to turn to the ways in which agency is possible as it is the first step toward demarginalizing the marginalized (Bordo 42). In other words, “if we do not struggle to force our work and workplaces to be informed by our histories of embodied experience, we participate in the cultural reproduction of dualism, both practically and representationally” (Bordo 42). It is simply unfeasible to claim that this chapter is a step toward implementing agency in the face of powerful structural forces, however, as Susan Bordo brilliantly states, not recognizing the ways in which agency is possible is being complicit in the dualistic “freedom versus oppressed” binary, so rather, I find it to be a catalyst to someone’s change. In the next chapter, I will continue to exemplify queer migration in the Afrodisporic novel *GraceLand* (2004) by Chris Abani, but rather than discussing the role of agency and autonomy during the war, this novel turns to the post-war political and economic ramifications.
Chapter Two: Queer Migration in GraceLand (2004)

Introduction

‘No victors and no vanquished;’ this ephemeral acknowledgement of the past and envisioned unified future between the Biafrans and Nigerians continues to haunt modern Nigeria today (Lodge 1). It has been nearly five decades since the Nigerian federal military government declared the ending of the Biafran War, however, post-war ramifications continue to pervade intranational political and interpersonal dynamics between the federal government and Biafran secessionists even today.

On January 15th, 1970, Nigeria’s new ruler, General Yakuba Gowan, conjunctionally ended the war while guaranteeing amnesty and other protections for Biafran nationalists and Igbo people: “[The secessionists] would enjoy the same rights as other Nigerians, welcome to live and work throughout the federation. They would keep their property. Public employees would be reinstated. The government would undertake relief and reconstruction. There would be no recriminations against leaders or soldiers” (Lodge 9-10). From the perspective of the authoritative state, the promise was rightfully maintained. The east engaged 35,000 civil servants, including former Biafran officials and citizens, while the north recruited significant numbers of former Biafrans into key political and leadership positions under Gowan’s 12-state system (Lodge 10). Further, the federal government claimed that post-war humanitarian efforts mended widespread starvation and physiological health issues due to a three month resource supply, and had successfully rebuilt the country’s infrastructural and financial debts due to the 12-fold revenue increase from the oil boom (Lodge 11). Despite the state’s effort to rehabilitate,

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5 The 12-state system was a power dispersal tactic that Gowan topographically, and symbolically, enforced after Biafran nationalistic tensions arose in the east at the brink of the war. As a result, the three Nigerian regions were separated into 12 separate states: North-western, north-eastern, Kano, north-central, Benue-Plateau, Kwara, western, Lagos, midwestern, Rivers State, south-eastern, and east-central.
reconstruct, and reconcile modern Nigeria, former Biafrans heavily debate the third and fourth ‘R’: Reconciliation and reintegration. Although Gowan guaranteed the seamlessly anti-discriminatory melding of political factions, the secessionists were met with a crude awakening. Not only were Igbos economically and politically marginalized by being placed lower on the chieftaincy hierarchical scale compared to their Nigerian counterparts, a position that devalued their intertribal power and influence, but they were discriminated against when it came to large-scale industry employment such as the Federal Civil Service or Federal investments (Ahazuem 196). Many were unable to retain their jobs, and the slim few that were able to “were fearful of staying…because of organized, ‘though unofficial’ intimidation…[after] returning home rapidly on the first day [back at work] having been subjected to a good deal of jostling and slapping their clothes torn and their effects interfered with [by non-Igbos]” (Ojeleye 97).

In addition to broken economic and political ‘guarantees,’ Gowan’s promise that the Igbos would be able to retain their property post-war fell on skeptical ears; The property that was formally owned by Igbos prior to the war became River State’s capital, who “more obstructed than supported the attempts of the former owners to reclaim their property” (Ahazuem 196). For example, those that attempted to migrate back to Port Harcourt to reclaim their housing property were usually urged to leave the land in the hands of the River State’s government, or, were brutally assaulted or killed by non-Igbos if they had tried to resist the threat (Ojeleye 94). Not only had they lost their loved ones, jobs, and political statuses, but they had lost any remanence of home.

By providing this brief post-war history, it is evident that Gowan’s promise for reconciliation and reintegration was an unsuccessful last-minute attempt to mend intertribal tensions, even after they were supposedly resolved by the succession of Biafra. For such a
palimpsestically complicated war, woven and entrenched by decades of colonial and intertribal tensions, it takes more than an official statement to mend the wounds of the past. According to some scholars, the effective diminishment of post-war tensions would have taken “the truthful acknowledgement of the harm inflicted on each other by both parties; honest and sincere regrets and remorse for the injury done; willingness and readiness to apologise for each other’s role in inflicting the injury; the embracement of the need to ‘let go’ of the anger and bitterness caused by the conflict; a total commitment by the offender not to repeat the injury; and a concerted effort by both sides in the imbroglio to redress past grievances that led to the conflict and compensate” (Ojeleye 92). Unfortunately, as this divided historiography reveals, only some of these elements were followed through, which is arguably why post-war social, political, and economic tensions between the Biafran secessionists and Nigerian federal government still persist today.

Reminiscing on the past and reflecting on the present, Nigerian author, Chris Abani, takes up and challenges these post-civil war tensions in his novel *GraceLand* (2004). Born and raised in Afikpo, Nigeria to an Igbo father and English mother in 1966, Abani’s bicultural relationship to the war directly shaped his later novel written during his higher educational career at the University of Southern California. Insistent upon being raised as an Igbo man, Abani “went through every single rite of passage, every initiation, and [spoke] the language inside and out” (Jones para 4). Even though his family temporarily migrated to England, his mother’s home, amidst initial rising war tensions, Abani’s family felt such an Igbo nationalistic tie that they chose to migrate back to Nigeria during the war so that his father could become a Red Cross official (Tunca para. 1). Despite his own biracial liminality, exemplified by “someone using a stone or brick to…crack [his] skull…to see if [his] blood would be red or white” and increased
biopolitical and necropolitical authoritative practices, including genocidal tactics like starvation, death, and the inability to immigrate outside of Nigeria, Abani found ways to resist through his writing (Jones). Abani reflected on his own intranational and international militarized diasporic journey between Nigeria and England when he published his first book *Masters of the Board* (1984) as a teenager, which fictionally described a failed coup on part of an ex-Nazi officer to reclaim power in Nigeria. Interestingly enough, the Nigerian authorities thought that because this novel mirrored a failed coup against the Babangida regime, that Abani was responsible for providing the blueprints, and ended up spending six months in jail for the accusations (Tunca). This hiccup did not stop him from writing and publishing; Abani ended up being imprisoned for a year after publishing *Sirocco* (1987) and was even placed on death row for an anti-governmental play *Song of a Broken Flute* (Tunca). After being released after eighteen months due to monetary bribery, Abani migrated to England where he lived in exile for a couple of years. Then, fearing for his life, he migrated to the United States to pursue his doctorate where he published his most renowned work *GraceLand* (2004).

Set in Afikpo and Lagos, Nigeria from 1972 through 1983, *GraceLand* (2004) follows the protagonist, Elvis Oke, as he navigates familial, interpersonal, and tribal hypermasculine and heteronormative expectations, the state’s shifting militaristic standards post-Biafran War, and his own blossoming sexuality. The book begins by contextualizing Elvis’ childhood, comprised of his father, Sunday, and his uncle, Joseph’s physical, verbal, and sexual abuse and his mother, Beatrice’s death. Faced with adversity, Elvis turns to impersonating and performing songs by American legend, Elvis Presley after he moves to Lagos and after his mother dies. Unfortunately, this untraditional job alienates him further from his family, but pushes him closer to his best friend, Redemption, and other social outcasts like The King of Beggars, who teach him how to
navigate the streets. Redemption urges him to work for the Colonel as a cocaine dealer and organ trafficker, while the King of Beggars becomes a fatherly, moral influence in his life by allowing him to join his theatrical group comprised of dancers, musicians, and actors who perform across remote villages in Nigeria. Amidst Elvis’ black market stint, the Nigerian government sanctions the demolition project, a way to physically and symbolically rid of poverty not only to boost capitalistic enterprise through tourism, but arguably to erase the ramifications of the war. Sunday ends up sacrificing his body for his home, just as the King of Beggars does with his battle against the Colonel, and in the end, both become martyrs against the state. The novel ends with a sense of bleak ambiguity as Redemption illegally gathers a passport for Elvis under his name so that he can immigrate to America, not necessarily by choice, but so he can “freely” explore his own identity liberated from impeding structural and interpersonal forces.6

Upon publication, many critics hailed Abani’s ability to grapple with how structural forces, specifically poverty and ghettoization, impede on an individual’s autonomy. Drenched in a “nefarious blend of poverty, disenfranchisement and violence,” GraceLand (2004) has been coined a moral tale, “where questions about how to act become very concrete and consequential” (Hunt 242-243). Interestingly enough, while one might think that the consummation of structuralism and individualism would birth a confined, restricted subject who is constantly surveilled and controlled by the state, scholars have emphasized the book’s optimistic, agentic twist by claiming that Abani is interested in “what people can do to change their [post-colonial life] circumstances” (Hunt 243). While I appreciate the attention to the novel’s more agentic

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6 I chose to put “freely” is scare quotes as the United States is stereotypically depicted as a liberal, progressive place where people can explore facets of their identity free of institutional and informal repression, but as we know, that could not be further from the truth. Although one could argue that the U.S. is more accepting toward non-normative gender and sexual identities than Nigeria is, I would still argue that Elvis immigrating to the U.S. at the end of the novel is based on an unrealistic dream based off of stereotypes.
sociological imagination, the ways in which individuals shape social structures and vice versa, I examine in this chapter an aspect of the novel that few critics have discussed: queer migration. Given that most of the reviews were enthralled by Elvis’ coming of age story, I was surprised to see little to no criticism about how his performances shaped his gender or sexual identity, and how that intersects his criminal stint across Nigeria as each remote village or cosmopolitan city added a facet to his identity. In the next section, by defining queer migration as it applies to *GraceLand* (2004), I will show how these intersecting components not only helped shape Elvis’ characterization, but showed how agency and autonomy is possible during the threat of war and destruction, even after it has supposedly subsided.

**Queer Migration? Sort of Heard of Her**

As I flushed out in the previous chapter, queer migration is in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is a relational, affective practice that allows for individual or collective agency in the face of a war that seeks to demolish one’s ontology or epistemologies. Paradoxically, it is under these necropolitical conditions that one is able to adopt or side with queer migratory practices as war suspends and redefines social and cultural norms, meaning that because war is solely about enacting death as a form of authoritative control, one must either conform to the state’s wishes (i.e. the death drive) which is inherently queer by resisting state imposed narratives/expectations, or, one could attempt to openly resist, which is a more overt enactment of individual or collective agency, but is still queer. But what happens when war has subsided? While the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) exemplifies intranational queer migratory practices and identifications during the Biafran War, *GraceLand* (2004) exemplifies intranational queer migration after it.

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7 It should be noted that just because there was hardly any critical reviews that dealt with the intersection between queerness and migration does not mean there are not any scholarly articles on it.
After succession of Biafra, the Nigerian government made an effort to “mend” the economic and financial debts that loomed after the war by “modernizing” Nigeria, that is providing refuge and resources to survivors in hopes that a economically and socially unified image of Nigeria could replace that of destruction; little did citizens know it was an infrapolitical tactic used to control the flow of bodies in and out of the country. For example, following the war, the Nigerian authorities convinced former Biafrans that the booming oil industry would create more job opportunities for them to boost their own financial losses, and conversely, boost the nation’s crippling financial debt. Unfortunately, this idyllic possibility could not be further from reality: “Despite the fact that four oil wells are located in [the River Sate community, the] government has not given us electricity, good roles, and pipe bourne water” (Ahazuem 200). Rather than provide jobs for those that lost theirs and more, the government took advantage of the usage of infrastructure, a facet of modernization, to control who is able to stay and be the face of modern Nigeria, and who is forced to migrate and rebuild their homes inter— or intranationally as they do not have the financial or social means necessary to rebuild a life in what was once considered home.

In addition to economic infrapolitics, governmental rehabilitation programs such as Olu obodo—‘work for the town,’—were designed to support communal self-help projects with additional funding from the state, however, many survivors “deny that [the] government

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8 Drawing from Brian Larkin, I define infrapolitics as the ways in which infrastructure and industrialization become an implicit tool used by the state to hierarchize people on the basis of their socioeconomic statuses and to capitalize on romanticized tourist needs rather than turning to the poverty infested realities behind infrastructure. All of this occurs while citizens think that they are benefiting from it. For example, Larkin uses the example of generators, and how on the surface they seem to be promoting modern unity as they are scattered all over Lagos, but in reality, it is a way for the government to benefit off of civilians.

Further, I put “modernization” in quotes because it is not how readers would typically envision modern industrialization (i.e. rise in technological and infrastructural advances), but rather, implicates slums and slow violence as flushed out with survivor testimonies and Davis’ book.
provided any help for the reconstruction of their communities” (Harneit-Sievers 188). In fact, “many [programs] hardly ever reach the village level,” and instead, becomes a way for the state to establish who is worthy of reabsorption into the redefined “Nigerian” identity and who is not, which unfortunately has real migratory ramifications (Harneit-Sievers 189).

Survivors who were dejected from their homes after the war were forced to create living and communal spaces with what limited resources were available to them, so instead of an industrialized, modern utopia, shantytowns and urban slums arise out of the war and become synonymous with modernization (Davis 19). Some might argue that these poverty stricken spaces are drenched in liminality, not only through verbal discrimination as “slum dwellers” become interchangeable with “criminality,” but because residents are forcibly physically and symbolically marginalized by being pushed out of visible site or destroyed through governmental demolition projects (Davis). Contrarily, writers like Abani drench their novel with poverty porn, not to fetishize imperial or colonial stereotypes that link poverty with Nigerian infrastructural typography and culture, but to turn to the ways in which resistance to modernization and hypermasculine governmental discourses and practices is possible; this is how I define queer intranational migration, and argue that this is an alternative facet of necropolitics as it turns to the ways in which individual and collective agency are possible, even after a war seizes to impose destructive practices or death.

**Application of Queer Migration to GraceLand (2004)**

The novel abruptly begins with urban chaos amidst Elvis waking up on his sixteenth birthday; Lagos is drenched in impoverished sensorial imagery, “the smell of garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets and slate bodies…[the sound of] tin buckets scraping, the sound of babies crying, infants yelling for food and people hurrying but getting nowhere,” but plot
context and Elvis’ characterization lies in absentia (Abani 4). The reader is immediately thrown into disjuncture and dissonance as the affectual and sensorial overtones overwhelm the reader’s ability to firmly grasp what is going on, and instead, are faced with the implications of postmodern aesthetics amidst a “modernized” country: hypermasculinity. In other words, the overt sensorial imagery regarding this newly “modernized” country becomes synonymous with hypermasculine tendencies, which can be defined as the ways that the introductory structure of the novel delimits individual thought and expression. For example, in addition to the literal absence of Elvis’ characterization or plot contextualization, the only brief snippet of Elvis’ characterization is his spectrality: “Elvis stared into the muddy puddles imagining what life, if any, was trying to crawl its way out. His face, reflected back at him, seemed to belong to a stranger, floating there like a ghostly head in a comic book” (Abani 6). The characterization of Elvis’ presence through his absence reinforces the hypermasculine tendencies of “modernization,” evident through the muddy waters and the setting’s lifeless aura.

It is only after reminiscing on his liminality, his inability to fit into Lagos after migrating from Afikpo, that we are first introduced to his hypermasculine familial and interpersonal environment. Awoken by his father, Sunday, Elvis is nagged upon and urged to get a real job as dancing is considered something that they do on weekends at the bar (Abani 5). Unlike his father, who is an alcoholic who freely socializes with the community while his step-mother, Comfort, plays a submissive, nearly omniscient domestic role, Elvis resists hypermasculine gender roles that come along with modern capitalistic expectations by becoming a street performer who reenacts songs and dances by American icon, Elvis Presley. Initially, his

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9 As I briefly alluded to, postmodern aesthetics can be defined as any thought, expression, or praxis that rejects reliable and stable ephemerality. So in this case, it would be the ways in which Abani disorients the author through an anti-Bildungsroman (non-linear) introduction that places them in medias res, in the middle of the narrative with little to no context.
impersonations are constrained by his hypermasculine, gender and heteronormative familial past and his current societal present. He wants to put on makeup before his street performance, much like he did as a kid when his Aunt Felicia wove his hair into cornrows, helped him put on lipstick, a dress, and high-platform shoes, but the violent consequences of cross-dressing in a conservative environment seem to be holding him back. Much like his father’s physical and verbal refusal for his son to grow up as a “homosexual,” which is inherently flawed by misinformed stereotypes given that one’s fluid gender identity does not necessarily equate to their sexual identity, Elvis refuses to put on makeup presently as he justifiably thinks that it is a dangerous option, one where he could “be mistaken for one of the cross-dressing prostitutes that hung around the beach [and] were always hassled by the locals, and often beaten severely” (Abani 11, 61). Even though his job resists capitalistic gender norms, the way he enacts it is still confined by essentialist familial and societal standards. It is only after he migrates from downtown Lagos back to the swamp city, Maroko, where he is able to resist both modernization and the hypermasculine tendencies that come along with it.

After his father’s constant disapproval of his performance job, Elvis ends up becoming a laborer for a construction company in downtown Lagos, a physically demanding job that alters his fluid gender aspirations as he conforms to masculine ideals; he begins shaving like his co-workers, hanging out with his father and his array of friends, and even partakes in extremely laborious tasks like cement mixing. Although this career change might seem directly implicated by his father’s hypermasculine expectations, which I do think is partially the case, there is something to be said about the infrastructural job in and of itself. Elvis is quite literally “modernizing” Lagos, complicit in the littering of construction sites “because new high-rise apartment complexes and office blocks were going up seemingly overnight” (Abani 29). With
that said, he is unsatisfied by the “game of give-and-take” as it quite literally commodifies his body, turning the workers into “bodies that slogged through the day’s work, tight-lipped and taciturn” (Abani 28). They quite literally become extensions of the state, working to typographically marginalize their own communities and families. It is only after he is forcibly removed from the job site for being late and migrates back to his slum where he is able to resist modernization and hypermasculinization by reintegrating back into his performance routine, this time able to freely express his gender expression by using makeup:

With the tip of his index finger, he applied a hint of blue to his eyes, barely noticeable, but enough to lift them off the white of his face…Drawing quickly and expertly with the black eye pencil, he outlined his eyes, the tip of the pencil dancing dangerously close to his cornea. Pulling the mascara brush free, he knocked the dried goop off before dragging it through his already dense lashes. Again he examined his hard work intently before selecting a deep red lipstick. Not satisfied with its shine, he rubbed some petroleum jelly over his lips and then smacked them. Much better, he thought. He walked back to the table and pulled the wig on, bending to look in the mirror. Elvis had entered the building, he thought, as he admired himself. (Abani 77-78)

The first thing that stands out is the way that the cross-dressing routine becomes interchangeable with a new form of modernization: the ability to reconstruct and build his own gender identity. The way that the scene begins with mere material descriptors (i.e. the eye shadow, the eye liner, the mascara, etc.) and slowly develops into the ontological (re)making of Elvis “entering the building” invokes the idea that he has not fully abandoned his constructionist past, but has redefined it to build a new liberatory facet of himself rather than the infrastructural kind. It allows him to break free from the stark, masculine expectations that are perpetuated by his
family and the modern state, and instead, freely embellish in his androgyny: “Pushing back from the table, he began to dance around the room. By the time the record had come to an end, he was perspiring heavily” (Abani 78). There is a light air about this scene, one that rids of the external oppressors and soley focuses on the queer body. In other words, Elvis is free from familial and societal critique as this moment is soley about celebrating his own creation. In a way, Elvis stages utopia, meaning that his performance invokes futurity, “a time that is not here yet, a certain futurity, a could be, a should be…that stand[s] against capitalism’s over expanding and exhausting force field of how things ‘are and will be’” (Muñoz 98-99). In other words, the swift juxtaposition between the physical laborious job he is expected to partake in as a man in a heteropatriarchal leaning society and the career he wants to pursue creates a tension between the present, the gendered capitalistic “what is,” and a liberatory futuristic vision of what “could be.” This contrast allows for an alternate reality outside of the hypermasculine expectations, and allows for him to truly see and admire himself in the mirror contrary to the beginning of the book when he was only described in terms of what he was not in Lagos: his spectrality.

Although migrating to Maroko, a slum on the outskirts of Lagos, allowed for Elvis to transcend conformity to gendered career expectations and roles, it also allowed him to freely explore his sexuality. Whilst in Lagos, he is urged by his best friend, Redemption, to become a drug dealer for the Colonel to make some extra money as his impersonating career is not amounting to the financial standards that it needs to be to live independently from his father and Comfort. What begins as a low profile drug deal across bars and clubs in downtown Lagos turns into the international trafficking of bodies and body parts. Upon this inhumane realization, Elvis tries to help out those that were drugged for this purpose by informing them of their situation, exploiting the lie that they were being returned home to their parents, and tries to set them free
(Abani 234-238). Unfortunately, fearing for their own lives, Elvis and Redemption flee the job site, but end up being caught by the Colonel’s workers and held hostage in downtown Lagos as a result. Interestingly enough, it is not only the incapacitation and physical beatings that arise as a form of retribution, but Elvis’ sexuality is held against him as a method of torture: “He began rubbing a cool white paste all over Elvis’ body…Jerome smiled as he noted his expression. Still smiling, he took Elvis’ penis in one hand and gently smoothed the paste over it, working it up and down. Elvis found himself swell…It was not long before Elvis shuttered and shot semen all over his torture’s hand. ‘So you be homo,’ Jerome said, laughing breathlessly. Tears of shame streamed down Elvis’ face” (Abani 295). This homoerotic sadist scene is of interest given that Elvis seems more inflicted and torn by the homosexual desires that are imposed onto him rather than the physical pain that comes along with the chemical torturing scheme. His former ability to conform, or at least temporarily adhere to heteropatriarchal and hypermasculine values is nonconsensually, and ironically, exploited by a stark militaristic extension of the state (i.e. the Colonel’s co-worker). The once gender fluid and liberated Elvis in the slum of Maroko is demolished in Lagos through stark militaristic sexual objectification. Similar to how the novel began, Elvis reverts back to a heteronormative specter: “The doctor felt for a pulse, a heartbeat. There didn’t seem to be any. Elvis couldn’t understand it, because he was wide awake” (Abani 296). His ontology and characterizations are written in liminal terms, somewhere in-between the present and omniscient, the conscious and the unconscious, and consequently, he regresses back into a heteronormative façade through the sexualization of a young city dweller, Blessing. It is only when he migrates outside of Lagos, specifically back to Afikpo that he is able to resist the hypermasculine implications of modernism and explore his sexuality freely.
Before migrating to Lagos in the mid 1980s, Elvis grew up in Afikpo, an indigenous, communal town where he was raised by a matriarchal household comprised of his mother, Beatrice, and his grandmother, Oye. Although his father’s domineering presence was still present, he was still encouraged to explore his own identity and childhood by hanging out with the local boys. After watching and influenced by numerous heroic American films and prose, they decide to transition their conversations about sex into experimental practice at a local Anglican chapel: “The air here was light, unlike in the Catholic church, where the air was oppressive with taboos, guilt, incense, prayers and portents of magic. There were no crucifixes here, no statues, only an oil painting of a brilliant sunrise over the altar” (Abani 197). In contrast with “modern” Lagos, whose religion is still saturated by colonial religious discourses and practices like Catholicism, this church becomes the antithesis modernism as it invokes natural, antiquated collective space. The rural painting, free of industrial enterprise, in conjunction with their open and vulnerable discussion of sex creates this liberatory space where they are able to take discourse to praxis by sexually experimenting with each other: “They paired off, alternately lying on top of each other, humping through their clothing. As the afternoon wore on, they became a little more adventurous and were soon down to their underwear, then nothing” (Abani 197). The parallelization between this non-modern space and their ability to freely enact upon their desires amidst a post-war regime that seeks to rid of homosexual affect exemplifies intranational queer migration as this movement, both interpersonally and outside of Lagos, resists modernization and the hypermasculinization and heteronormativity that it perpetuates. While it is true that Uncle Joseph ends up ruining their experimental escapade by raping Elvis after watching them experiment with one another, I do think that this brief moment of anti-
modern, homosexual practices is worth mentioning as it highlights Elvis’ ability to choose his sexuality, a form of individual agency, in contrast to it being imposed onto him in Lagos.

**Form of the Novel as Exemplifying Intranational Queer Migration**

I began the application of intranational queer migration by talking about how the sensorial, anti-Bildungsroman form of the novel connotes a sense of “modern” hypermasculinity as it controls and inhibits Elvis’ characterization in Lagos from the get go, and it is only when he is intranationally migrates elsewhere, specifically Maroko and Afikpo, where he is able to truly embellish in his fluid gender and sexuality without heteropatriarchal ideologies being imposed onto him by his family or “modern” institutions. With that said, I would like to return to the form of the novel as it is more than just a deviation from the Bildungsroman genre “a way in which history, tradition, and therefore identity, are [re]constructed with the selective inclusion and exclusion of histories, voices, and experiences,” but the epigraphs signify intranational queer migration as they embody indigeneity and retaining of familial and Igbo culture amidst a modernizing regime that seeks to rid of that (Aycock 14).

Amidst his mother’s death, Elvis is given Beatrice’s journal which contains intergenerational recipes and brief allusions to Igbo culture and values. Although one could argue that the peritext has patriarchal overtones, specifically given the direct, authoritative tone and absence of women in epigraphs like “we have always done things this way. The kola-nut ceremony is part hospitality, part etiquette, part protocol and part history lesson. Unlike the Japanese tea ceremony, women take no part in the kola-nut ritual. In fact, female guests are never presented with kola nuts” I would argue that these snippets disrupt modern hypermasculinity, and are therefore queer (Abani 172). For example, at the beginning of the novel, an epigraph reads, “this is the kola nut. This seed is a star. This star is life. This star is us.
The Igbo hold the kola nut to be sacred, offering it at every gathering and to every visitor, as a blessing, a refreshment, or to seal a covenant. The prayer that precedes the breaking and sharing of the nut is: He who brings kola, brings life” (Abani 3). The emphasis on vitality and the naturalness that comes along with the nut invokes this agrarian, liberatory imagery which is immediately contrasted by the poverty, slum stricken implications of modernism. As I flushed out earlier, the first paragraph of the novel encapsulates an aura of confinement as Elvis presses his face against his window, watching the poverty infested town circulate around him. I would argue that the tension between the indigenous and the modern form of the novel results in a resistive, non-normative framework that carries on throughout the novel, and follows Elvis wherever he migrates to.

As I have flushed out in this chapter, queer migration can be defined as the ways in which intranational movement intersects with resistance to the hypermasculine ramifications of modernization and industrialism. For Elvis, migrating to more rural, indigenous communities means more gender and sexual fluidity, rather than being confined by the hypermasculine, heteronormative expectations that come along with modernizing regimes like the demolition project. Even though Elvis’ ability to fluidly express his androgyny is temporal and typically closeted within these more rural spaces, it still points to the ways in which agency and autonomy can be defined in terms of liminality as a method of counter-hegemonic resistance. This alternative facet of necropolitics turns to the ways in which individual and collective agency are possible, even after a war seizes to impose destructive practices or death.

While intranational queer migration turns to individual resistance to the post-war modernizing implications of war, as I argued in the Abani chapter, queer migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) can be defined as a relational, affective practice that allows for individual or collective agency in the face of a war that seeks to demolish one’s ontology or epistemologies. Necropolitical regimes like war either suspend or redefine norms, so it paradoxically allows for agency amidst an atmosphere that seeks to rid of it. For characters like Olanna and Kainene, this means staying and fighting for Biafra even though they have the socioeconomic means to migrate to refuge or a more stable country. Further, it means partaking in affectual practices, whether that means sexually or rewriting or redefining a relationship. It showcases the ways in which agency is possible during a war that seizes to enact death.

Concluding Remarks
I remember summarizing my thesis like this to a professor of mine who blankly looked at me and asked, “Why? Why turn to agency amidst our current political and biomedical pandemic situation? How is it even possible to envision agency and autonomy amidst the power of the state to politicize something as seemingly uncontrollable as a virus?”

A flood of responses came to mind, mainly having to do with my own positionality as a queer, gender non-conforming individual: “Because we are complicit in the cycle of structural oppression and discrimination if not, because thinking about ourselves as agents of the state and as autonomy-less beings is too depressing to conceive of, because change starts with resistance to the state, because…because…because…” Truthfully, I could not answer their question without relying upon my own first world privileges; I am writing this theoretical paper at a higher education institution for an honors designation, for highly distinguished and renowned professors to push and challenge me as a writer and scholar, so how is it possible to make a change when I am complicit in the problem?

After ruminating on my mental list of primarily western scholars who deal with the importance of agency within biopolitical and necropolitical contexts and thinking about how to implement their arguments into this conclusion, the answer came to me: it matters because we continue to rely upon our own first world experiences without turning to the ways that our western society and curriculum is enabled by, yet invisibilizes, the queer migrations of African people and other Black diasporic subjects who are displaced by transnational corporations and neocolonial economies that produce the commodities (oil, diamonds, tech materials, etc.) that we consume.

Like any criminal act, involuntary slave labor is reliant upon both a perpetrator and a victim: major corporations like GEO Group and vulnerable populations like queer identifying
Afrodiasporic people who are deemed so socially and culturally disposable due to their intersectional identities, that their violent marginalization and exploitation is used to justify the unethical, inhumane practices. After slavery was “abolished” in the United States in 1865, the state began profiting off of private (and public) prisons through convict leasing, chain gangs, and the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIE). Each of these programs have their specific niche, but all of them have one thing in common: “The apparent façade that prison labor programs benefit prisoners [by providing jobs that would ‘help’ them reintegrate into society], reaffirming that the prison system operates with a greater interest in generating a profitable labor force than to rehabilitating prisoners while and protecting the American population” (Hammad 81). Given that mass incarceration disproportionately affects Black communities and queer identifying or prescribed people are at the highest risk of violence and abuse within the system, it can be assumed that queer Black diasporic subjects are oftentimes the most targeted by other incarcerated people and prison guards, but least visible in terms of prison labor exploitation. After searching innumerable research websites and archives, I could not find one study that examines the intersection between queerness, Black diasporic people, and

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10 I put “abolished” in quotes because many scholars and activists argue that slavery is not over, but rather, has been modernized through the prison industrial complex and other global exploitative labor practices. Further, convict leasing specifically referred to the process of leasing convicts for cheap to private parties primarily in the South who would use their labor to better equip them for assimilation into capitalistic society (Hammad 70). After convict leasing was abolished by organized labor unions, the chain gang was born, which refers to the practice of leasing convicts to the state as opposed to private parties to work on public projects (Hammad 71). Due to its’ inhumane nature, it was eradicated in 1951, but in 1971, Congress passed the Justice System Improvement Act which established PIE: “The program was created to promote employment opportunities for inmates so they could ‘acquire marketable skills to increase their potential for successful rehabilitation and meaningful employment upon release.’ PIE allows private industries [like GEO Group] ‘to establish joint ventures with state and local correctional agencies to produce goods [like higher education office and classroom supplies] using inmate labor’” (Hammad 77). In other words, it is portrayed as a rehabilitative, reformist program that “helps” inmates assimilate to society upon release, but again, is a way for the state to profit off of primarily queer, Black bodies.
neocolonial capitalistic enterprise.¹¹ We know that it exists given that we are reliant upon it, so why are we intentionally or inadvertently ignoring it? What are the implications?

By ignoring the labor that goes into the chairs that we sit in, the cell phones or laptops that we use, the trails that we hike, we are complicit in the repression of queer migratory practices, unapologetically and ignorantly feeding off of what agency, autonomy and liminality that they have. Because we live in the digital age where rejecting technological commodities is nearly impossible, especially amidst our current pandemic, it would be simply unfeasible to suggest that resisting exploitation has to start with resisting the commodities that are produced out of slave labor; however, it is important to acknowledge that if agency and autonomy are possible as exemplified in these novels and the “I Am Undocuqueer” series, even if it is liminal, temporal, and not a typical association like protests, riots, strikes, etc., then it starts with spreading awareness of our complicity in repressive regimes; if my own inadvertent subjugation of migrants matters to me, then chances are that it matters to someone else; and if it matters to someone else, then maybe it will matter to a whole group or population, and the domino effect will enact some form of change.

¹¹ I am aware that my resources are limited to the university’s research data base and archival sources, so just because I could not find any does not mean that they do not exist. However, given that our university is relatively privileged when it comes to accessing content nationally and even transnationally, I do find the lack of research on this topic surprising and disturbing, but reinforces the point that our higher education system is reliant upon queer Afro diasporic labor commodities but veils their dependency on them.
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