

LITERATURE: MEGA CITIES: MEGA NARRATIVES.

ASCERTAINING ‘THE MEGA TRUTH’.

The subject of our discourse: Literature: Mega Cities: Mega Narratives --is fraught with ideological conflict. With its emphasis on the word ‘Mega’, we are at once confronted with its ‘definitional truth’. For Mega is ‘factually defined’ as: “a unit prefix in the metric system denoting a factor of one million.” (*Wiktionary*). Mega also means: “very large; huge; extensive; colossal”. (*Oxford Dictionary*). In the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* it is defined as something: “of the highest level of rank, excellence, or importance.”

These different definitions are significant, for while *Wiktionary* emphasizes the specific and precise; *Oxford* and *Merriam-Webster’s* definitions are conceptual and subjective. This situation creates ‘ideological conflict,’ for the truth of a given phenomenon is more often than not determined by belief and perception rather than the actual and the factual.

For instance by dint of their actual sizes, mega cities are cities with a population of over 10 million. Since the population of Lagos is over 21 million, this makes Lagos a mega city.

London and New York, however, are not strictly-speaking mega cities because their populations are a little over 8 million. (*Wikipedia*). Nevertheless, they are popularly regarded as mega cities.

In other words, the truth of a given matter or entity is determined by popular perception as opposed to actual reality.

This ‘conflict’ also applies to narratives: the written and oral interpretations of reality that inform our lives. As such, where we stand depends on where we sit. Our values ultimately determine

how we interpret reality. In the process, we must try to ascertain whether popular perceptions are truthful or deceitful; and whether they are factual or fictional. We need to decide whether our realities should be governed by universalistic mega narratives or by local particularistic definitions.

How we perceive and regard an issue is never value-free. In this vein, the 'entities' of Literature, Mega Cities, and Mega Narratives coalesce and are informed by conflicting ideologies. The perception of 'the mega' emanates from truth or falsehood; from power or weakness; from the dominant or the dominated. It is a conflict which engages all of humankind; a conflict which, if not positively harnessed, results in violence, at once psychological and physical.

NARRATIVE/LITERATURE/STORY

Narrative and Literature refer to oral and written stories passed down through generations ¹. These include drama, poetry, the novel, the essay, the short story; and the daily stories we tell each other. Story-telling features in every culture or society where myths and every-day occurrences are repeated and retold. This enriches the life of such communities and are all regarded as narratives.

These narratives are more than descriptions of 'real' phenomena; they are profoundly connected to our understanding and interpretation of reality. Regardless of nation or culture: "every human group has a narrative; every society, every age has a narrative". (Eric Selbin, *Revolution, Resistance, Rebellion: The Power of Story* , 2010). "Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself".(Ronald Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural

¹ Eric Selbin argues that Narrative and Story are different 'entities'. See *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance; The Power of Story*(p.2)

Analysis of Narratives,” ; 1977, 1979). According to A. S. Byatt, narrative is: “as much part of human nature as breath and the circulation of blood.” (*The New York Times*, 1999). Indeed, each human-being can be regarded as a narrative; a person whose life tells a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Each community has its own narrative. This then connects with other cultures and societies in: “meaningful patterns: structures which cohere through time . . . offering a sequence of events, which in turn reflect the social context.”(Eric Selbin, 50). As many philosophers attest, human-beings have a deep narrative structure in the way they think. (Taylor, 1989), (Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1986), (Smith 2003). (Bruner 2002, 13).

Narratives tell us which events and actions are significant and which can be ignored. The inter-relationship of events in our lives is explained by these narratives. (William Grassie, *Entangled Narratives*, 1) Narratives shape our ideals and values and give our lives meaning. As Christian Smith contends, human beings are: “animals who make stories but also animals who are made by our stories.” (2003, 64).

Achebe in his novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), stresses the importance of story-telling in African communities when an elder avers: “The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we, the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.” (124).

Story here is equated with control of our realities; and of our perception of those realities. For: “Through stories people are able to produce (and perhaps thereby create at least the illusions of both control over and direction in) their lives, bringing to bear not just their own knowledge and

experiences, but those of their communities.” As a result: “the abstract (is made) concrete, the complex more manageable, and rendering matters ‘real.’ ” (Eric Selbin, 1).

However although stories are often perceived as positive forces that unify; they can also be divisive and destructive. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie emphasizes the latter in her discussion of ‘The Danger of a Single Story.’ (TED July 2009 Lecture). Stories can simultaneously be used to dehumanize and to humanize. They are sources of empowerment or disempowerment. Moreover they: “occupy a conflicted space, commonly thought of as authentic and as deceptive ... seen as universal in their implications and as dangerously particularistic – idiosyncratic even. Storytelling is appreciated, enjoyed, and distrusted” especially when stories: “are categorized as truth;” for it is impossible to be totally accurate in any account, when that story: “is interpreted by teller and then re-interpreted by listener.” (Eric Selbin, 30).

Given the importance of stories and narratives; the issue becomes which one we identify with; which stories and narratives will best distill and construct a set of values, meanings and morals that will enhance our lives. In other words, we have to appropriate a governing story from the stories or narratives we read and hear. Our morals are not as Vitz argues, derived from logic but from: “analogical applications of powerful stories.” (1990, 2). Indeed irrespective of culture or climate many societies have appropriated stories like the biblical-enslaved Israelites’ struggle for freedom from Egypt in their fiction; even as representations of their own unique condition.²

Moreover stories are drawn from the stories of revered elders of the community; which are then employed as :“mini-narratives to new situations in the course of our life.” (William Grassie,

² See for example-E.K. Braithwaite: *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights of Passage; Islands; Masks*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Entangled Narratives, 1). Each story or mini narrative it can be argued, represents a truth; which may or not conflict with the truth of other stories.

MEGA CITIES

It is in this manner that the ‘Truth of Mega Cities’ becomes open to question. As stated above, factual interpretation of a thing is often based on perception or belief. Factually, Mega Cities are defined as : “metropolitan areas with a total population in excess of 10 million.” They are cities which comprise: “a single metropolitan area or two or more metropolitan areas that converge.” (*Wikipedia*). This definition emphasizes an evaluation of reality established on facts, figures, numbers.³

As of 2017, there are 47 actual mega-cities worldwide: “Most of these urban agglomerations are in China and other countries of Asia. The largest are the metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Shanghai, and Jakarta, each having over 30 million inhabitants. China alone has 15 megacities, and India has six. Africa, Europe and North America have three each.” (*Wikipedia*)

Lagos is Africa’s largest city. It is an actual mega-city with a population of over 21 million people. Here conflicting numbers are evident for: “The Lagos State Government estimates the population of Lagos at 17.5 million, although this number has been disputed by the Nigerian Government and found to be unreliable by the National Population Commission of Nigeria, which put the population at over 21 million in 2016.” (Web). Moreover, with regard to the population of Nigeria itself; stories abound as to the truth of its actual size. As Holly Newby, US Survey Manager for ORC Macro contends: “The problem with Nigeria and doing any data collection effort is it could be the god’s honest truth . . . You could have the most exact census,

³ In spite of this numerical definition of Mega Cities-London and New York which comprise a little over eight million in their population are often regarded as Mega Cities.

and there will always be people who don't believe it.”⁴ In other words, facts are often challenged by the 'stories' behind those facts. Regardless of facts, perceptions and beliefs hold sway as to their truth.

MEGA NARRATIVES

These conflicts come to the fore with Mega-Narratives, grand narratives or Meta-Narratives as they are usually termed. According to John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, a meta-narrative: “is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.”(1998). For E.D. Ermath, it is: “a story about a story, encompassing and explaining other 'little stories' within conceptual models that assemble the 'little stories' into a whole.” (E.D. Ermath, (1992) 156).

These Mega-Narratives as William Grassie contends, are often not perceived as stories, rather: “People . . . tend to take them as an unarticulated background, the taken-for-granted truth, the way things really are.” This is particularly demanding because we do not relate to each other according to hard scientific facts that can be said to be truths. We relate to each other in terms of ideology and story. We are guided by morals which derive from mega-narratives that we regard as truths. (William Grassie, *Entangled Narratives* and “Eating Well Together: Metanexus: The Challenge” - Posted in Essay, Selected Essays. Web).

TRUTH

What is truth?

⁴ See Newby, Holly.—In S. Yin. “Objections surface over Nigerian Census Results-Population”. April 2007 Provisional Results of the 2006 Census.” (Web).

In the Bible, Pontius Pilate famously asked Jesus this very question. (*John 18:38*). Jesus testified that he was witness to the truth. But the Jews believed him to be an agent of deception. Their perception of Jesus leads them to demand his crucifixion. Although Pilate finds no basis for a charge against Jesus, nevertheless, he agrees that Jesus should be crucified. From the perspective of his followers, Jesus is the truth. But from the perspective of his persecutors, Jesus is a deceiver.

This truth/deception dichotomy is also evident in responses to the Bible. The Bible is often regarded as a Mega -Narrative espousing universal truths. However, to philosophers like William Horton, the Bible is not a mega narrative but a “mega-story.” To Horton, Mega- Narratives are ‘big stories describing mighty events.’ Jesus Christ is simply a major character in the unfolding plot of a big story. This makes the Bible a Mega- Narrative and not a Meta- Narrative from Horton’s point of view, for he insists the Bible does not represent universal truths.

He says:

“All of our worldviews are stories. Christianity does not claim to have escaped this factThe prophets and apostles did not believe that God’s mighty acts in history (mega narratives) were dispensable myths that represented universal truths (meta-narratives). For them, the big story did not point to something else beyond it but was itself the point God’s mighty acts in history are not myths that symbolize timeless truths; they create the unfolding plot within which our lives and destinies find the proper coordinates. The heart of the Christian narrative . . . is the story that interprets all other stories, and the lead character is Lord over all other lords.” (Michael S. Horton, (2011) (Chapter 1).

Again we ask: What is truth? Is Horton's distinction between Mega- Narratives and Meta- Narratives a mind-game rooted in deception? Is it intended to obfuscate the truth? Writers on Mega- Narratives make no such distinctions. Mega- Narratives and Meta- Narratives are seen as one and the same.⁵ As previously defined, they assert over-arching and universal belief systems. The challenge remains that of determining what is truth.

In his article, "Theories of Truth: A Comprehensive Synthesis" (2011), Ronald K. Hoeflin enumerates various conceptions of truth. These include "subjective truth," described by Kierkegaard as: "a commitment to believe, in the face of 'objective uncertainty', in matters which cannot be demonstrated or verified, such as the existence of God." (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, qtd from Hoeflin-OCP, p. 857).

It also includes what Hoeflin also refers to as "the pragmatic theory of truth," ascribed to the American philosophers Peirce, James, and Dewe. This interpretation of truth urges: "a connection between what is true and what is useful, pointing out, for instance, that a mark of a successful scientific theory is that it enables us, through associated developments in technology, to manipulate nature in ways hitherto unavailable to us." (qtd from Hoeflin-OCP, p. 882). Hoeflin cites Stephen P. Stich's position in *The Fragmentation of Reason* (1990) in the following manner: "We literally should not care whether our beliefs are true or false, but rather whether they enable us to achieve more substantive goals such as happiness and well-being." (qtd. from Hoeflin-OCP, p. 882). Hoeflin argues that each theory of truth can exist independently. The one

⁵ See : Jean Francois Lyotard's definition in: **Chapter 4: Metanarrative and Local Narrative: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/97461/9/09_%20chapter%2004.pdf**

simultaneously ‘co-operates’ with the other, bringing about a unified conception of truth. Interestingly, he employs a story to buttress his point. He refers to the familiar fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant where some blind men are asked to feel different parts of the elephant’s body. They arrive at: “seemingly incompatible notions of what it is to be an elephant, the problem is resolved by showing how all these parts interconnect.” (Hoeflin).

In other words, the narrative or story, has the ability, perhaps more so than any other medium, to ‘deduce the meaning of truth,’ even when the subject discussed is truth itself. As Tilly observes: “when most people take reasons seriously, those reasons arrive in the form of stories.” (2006: 95).

CHALLENGE OF MEGA- NARRATIVES

This is the main challenge of Mega- Narratives; that societies accept them as truth. Often we become so indoctrinated by the Mega- Narrative that facts and the interpretation of those facts are ignored, especially in the areas of religion and politics. With the ‘mega ideology’ hovering in the background directing our thoughts, actions and morals; a particular Mega- Narrative is seen as the only ideology which should be upheld. Thus a fundamentalist Christian would champion the Bible as his guideline; a fundamentalist Muslim would adhere to the Qu’ran as representing the single and only truth through which his realities are perceived.⁶ In the political arena, a communist’s worldview contrasts with those who believe in a capitalist free market system. Each group asserts its ideology as the only truth which should determine the lives of men.

As such Mega- Narratives compete with each other for dominance. This results in prejudice wherein one party seems incapable of understanding the other. Furthermore, each indulges in

⁶ See William Grassie, *Entangled Narratives*.

‘name games;’ deeming ‘the other’ as evil and inhuman. The cumulative effect of this leads, more often than not, to: “the escalating spiral of ideological violence.” (William Grassie, *Entangled Narratives*). As earlier intimated, this in turn, leads to physical violence between nations, groups and individuals.

ADHERENCE TO PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF IDEOLOGY/MEGA-NARRATIVES AS TRUTH

Each Mega- Narrative upholds a book; a physical manifestation of its ideological narrative such as the Bible or the Communist Manifesto. These books are deemed sacrosanct by ‘believers.’ Therefore, they seek to preserve and protect them physically, thinking that in so doing they are protecting the ideas in them. Their opponents have the same mindset: they seek to destroy the books believing that in so doing they are destroying the ideas and ideologies in the books.

Literature is replete with examples of this ‘human tendency’. The physical/book is deemed more powerful and influential than the spiritual and psychological/ideas.

For example, in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the colonizing mission of Prospero can only succeed with his books; the repository of his ‘magic’. He loves his books and prizes them above his dukedom. (Act 1, Scene 2). He employs ‘the magic’ of their ideology to subjugate Caliban/the colonized. Consequently, Caliban aware of the power that resides in the books of Prospero, his colonizer; insists on possessing them. He believes that without them: “He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not one spirit to command. They all do hate him as rootedly as I. Burn but his books.” (*The Tempest*, Act 3 Scene). Caliban believes that if he can only destroy the

colonizer's books, he will secure his freedom. So doing, Caliban emphasizes the physical; the books; rather than the concepts therein.

This penchant is also seen in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. (2006). The novel is a fictional account of the Nigerian Civil War. It details the physical violence between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra. More importantly, it examines the 'ideological violence' between and within the two groups. In this regard, the relationship between Odenigbo a university lecturer and intellectual; and Ugwu, his illiterate houseboy, becomes significant. Ugwu adulates Odenigbo's supposedly superior 'book knowledge.' He sees it as a vehicle for gaining ascendancy in the world. This causes him to reverently address Odenigbo as 'Master.'

When the war intensifies, Odenigbo, his family, and Ugwu are forced to flee Enugu for Aba, the Biafran capital. Later, Odenigbo and Ugwu return to 'their' house. They are confronted by a pile of Odenigbo's books and research papers which the Federal Army has burnt. Ugwu sees his master's dejection in the midst of his 'burnt ideology' and considers him: "so undignified, so unmasterly." (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 418).

In effect, Ugwu and the Nigerian Federal Army similarly equate destruction of the physical/books with the destruction of the psychological/ the concepts in the books. Indeed, when Ugwu confronts the apparent destruction of his master's ideology, he realizes a new sense of power over his master. The master dominant /servant dominated axis collapses with the destruction of the master's books as opposed to the ideology therein.

This situation also applies to 'real life' scenarios. Outside of the realm of fiction, perhaps the most infamous episode of book-burning occurred in Nazi Germany on May 10, 1933. The Nazis

wanted to “purify” German culture and the German language; to affirm traditional German values. To this end they burnt: “over 25, 000 volumes of un-German” books. Among the books burnt were those penned by Helen Keller because her works championed: “the disabled, pacifism, improved conditions for industrial workers, and women's voting rights.”⁷ Such themes and ‘notions’ were deemed subversive by the Nazi government. Tellingly, in response to the burning of her books, Helen Keller wrote to the student body of Germany in 1933: “History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas. Tyrants have tried to do that often before, and the ideas have risen up in their might and destroyed them. You can burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas in them have seeped through a million channels and will continue to quicken other minds.”⁸

Most significantly perhaps, the Nazi government were insistent on burning the works of the 19th century German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine who wrote in his 1820–1821 play *Almansor* the famous admonition: “Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people.”⁹ His words indicate the violence inherent in the negative power of the Nazi Mega-Narrative, which upholds the superiority of the Aryan race. Moreover, book-burning in itself, as earlier observed, reveals the ‘deceptive credence’ bequeathed to physical manifestations of the narrative. In short, Mega-Narratives fuel violence. Each Mega- Narrative can be regarded as a kind of ‘colonialist weapon.’ In this sense, one narrative tries to ‘mentally colonize’ ‘the other.’

To effect this ‘mental colonization’ physical violence is often employed in the assertion of a particular perceived truth or “world view.” Ironically, ‘the truth’ of this situation is that: “ it is

⁷ Book Burning: *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*.

⁸ See *Open Culture*: May 16th 2017: Helen Keller writes a letter to Nazi Students before they burn her books.

⁹ Book Burning: *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*.

possible to rationalize just about anything and everything within that worldview” for: “people tend to carefully select facts and the interpretation of those facts based on their metanarratives.”(William Grassie, *Entangled Narratives*, 1).

As Christian Smith observes:

The problem with a narratological understanding of human persons – and probably an important reason modern people resist thinking of themselves as ultimately storytelling and believing and incarnating animals – is that it is difficult rationally to adjudicate between divergent stories. How do you tell which one is more deserving of assent and commitment than others? (*Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, 87).

The issue then is that the truth of narratives and stories of any kind cannot be appropriated by referencing the factual and the physical. It is not open to ‘rational adjudication’.

Perhaps this is because narrative/story are profoundly related to our ideals. Arguably ideals cannot be subjected to rationalization. The writer Ben Okri significantly observes:

You have a sense of an ideal, you have a sense of the way you wish things could or should be. This carries already within it a moral universe, a world framed with all kinds of dimensions and boundaries. You shape a world when you begin a story. (Okri, Ben. Interview by Charles Henry Rowell. *Callaloo* 37.2 (2014): (219) .

HOW THE MEGA -NARRATIVE SHAPES OUR WORLD

Are we sensitive to the mystery, the ideals, of a moral universe ? How have we been employing Mega- Narratives to shape and create our world? From the above it would seem that Mega-

Narratives are essentially deleterious to the human race. This evaluation is in keeping with the views of Jean Francois Lyotard, perhaps the most famous exponent of the negativities of Mega-Narratives.

In his work: *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979)—Mega or Meta-Narratives are defined as universal belief systems which: “ tend to explain all other ‘little stories’ and therefore make universal and totalizing claims about reality, knowledge or experience. Science, nationalism and different religious and ideological systems are examples of such metanarratives.” (*New World Encyclopedia*, Web).

According to Lyotard: “ the existence of universal and eternal truths can no longer be claimed; legitimacy can only reside in what he terms petits récits , ‘small’ or ‘localized’ narratives.”(*New World Encyclopedia*, Web).

In this summation Lyotard reacts to the 18th century Age of the Enlightenment which championed : “the development of objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art.”(Hal Foster, *Post Modern Culture*,9).

The Post -Modernists rebel against such theories of the large, the mega, the universal; and in the process Mega- Narratives lose their credibility. Each little story is a discourse in itself: “Different discourses are language games; each of them has its own rules, structures, and moves, and none is privileged.” (*Lyotard*: qtd. In *Wikipedia*). To Lyotard, postmodern society reveals: “various language games struggling against diversity and conflict; language games which relate to :“multiplicity of communities”; the many separate :“systems in which meanings are produced and rules for their circulation are created.” (*Lyotard*: qtd. In *Wikipedia*).

For example the Meta- Narrative of “human emancipation”; of how the human race has set itself free; combines the language games of science, historical conflicts, human qualities-representing a universal judgement of how the human race has developed, become civilized in terms of wealth and moral well-being. Accordingly, our ethics, judgements, should be evaluated in relation to this Mega- Narrative; one which denies particularity and privileges: “abstract conceptuality.”(Lyotard: qtd. In *Wikipedia*)

As such, Postmodernism goes against this perspective of the large, universal; and is characterized by fragmentation: “This pertains to the inability . . . the unnecessary, the undesirability, of referring to any unified, consistent, centered field, idea system, or narrative.” (A. Fuat Firat, ‘Fragmentations in the Postmodern.’ (1992).

Put another way, the ‘truth of reality’ should not be ascertained with reference to the mega. There is no unifying vision or even a common ideal or aspiration which can be realized from either mega cities or from a Mega- Narrative. Thus there is argued an : “incredulity toward metanarratives” ; to dominant grand theories , world philosophies such as :“the progress of history, the knowability of everything by science, and the possibility of absolute freedom.”(Lemert, Charles C. “After Modern.” *Social Theory: the multicultural and classic reading*, 456).

To Lyotard such theories cannot represent the whole of humanity. Everyone has :“their own perspective and story”. Everyone has their own notion of reality; rather than claiming it to be a universal truth. It is a falsehood if a narrative claims: “to be the best or only way to understand reality.” (Lyotard, Jean-François . *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir*; 7).

However, detractors of Lyotard's work such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy deconstruct his theories. (Derrida 1992; Nancy 1985). ¹⁰ They argue in the main that: "Lyotard's thought becomes overly dependent on differences; between categories that are given as fixed and well defined." To Manfred Frank (1988) Lyotard rather than putting forward a rational solution to the injustice of the Mega -Narrative simply notes injustice. Indeed as James Williams (2002) contests, Lyotard's work on postmodern philosophy presents an essentially: "destructive modern nihilism."

On his part, Charles J. Stivale,(1990) while applauding the importance of Lyotard's work observes that Lyotard: " 'in his attempt' to reconstruct 'reality' in the convenient names of "truth" and "common sense" ... leave(s) unexplored the broad philosophical bases from which Lyotard draws support, as well as important questions that he raises regarding history, justice and critical judgement." (In-Elliott, Anthony, and Larry J. Ray. "Jean Francois Lyotard." *Key Contemporary Social Theorists*, 214.).

In other words, Lyotard ironically relies on a 'common Mega- Narrative' to present his position. So doing he emphasizes the conflictual elements of mega dominant and micro dominated. Furthermore he does not proffer solutions as to the negativities of the Mega- Narrative.

POST COLONIAL NARRATIVES

For peoples who have been historically subjected to the 'mega narrative of colonialism'; Mega-Narratives are particularly repugnant. This is because they emanate from the apparently dominant powers of Europe; whose theories of civilizing 'the other' led to the brutalization of body, mind and spirit of the colonized. As such, under no circumstances should Mega-Narratives be trusted. Indeed, post-colonial writers invariably relate to Mega -Narratives in light of its

¹⁰ (qtd. In *Wikipedia; Tomb of Jean-Francois Lyotard* , retrieved 2017-11-05)

applicability to themselves, ensuring that they tend to see Mega- Narratives as akin to “weapons of mass destruction.”

These ‘weapons’ are wielded by the dominant West to ‘colonize the very minds’ of the physically colonized. They are employed to disempower colonized peoples. They are used simply to serve the colonizer’s purposes of global ideological ,political, economic, and societal domination. More significantly, Mega- Narratives bastardize the truth. In the repeated pronouncement and propounding of the Mega- Narrative in the promotion of the ‘civilizing ideal,’ the colonizer’s prejudicial worldview is presented as actual and factual universal truth.

This inflicts ‘psychological violence’ by the colonizer against the colonized, with far-reaching effects. Through the colonial enterprise, false notions of implied inferiority of blacks to whites are propagated, undermining the self-respect and denying the humanity of the black man. This ethos of white supremacy, proclaimed by such European intellectuals as those of the Social Darwinist school, found concrete expression in the institution of white colonial rule in Africa.

The Mega- Narrative super-imposition of the cultural and moral values of the metropole on those of the periphery is prolific and profound. As Franz Fanon rightly observes: “For colonialism, (the) vast continent (of Africa) was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstition and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals.” (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 170/171).

Not surprisingly, post colonialist writers feel compelled to respond stridently to this colonial mega narrative. They see it as amounting to a systematic attack on their very existence. As such, they feel the need to counter this with their own stories; written from their own perspective of

events. Their writings maintain that the Mega- Narrative of colonialists is ‘fiction’. It can neither be regarded as fact, nor as representing “the whole truth and nothing but the truth” of “the colonial experience.”

Writers like Coetzee rebel against the Mega -Narrative of colonialism. In his novel *Foe* (1986) he ‘re-tells’ Daniel Defoe’s iconoclastic novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In the latter novel Robinson Crusoe, is shipwrecked on an island. He recounts the story of his civilizing mission; of how he transformed the area from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilization’. This is the ‘truth’ of his own story. But Coetzee’s protagonist Susan Barton, re-writes the experience of colonization from the colonized point of view. She declares: “The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island. You call it an episode, but I call it a story in its own right.”(*Foe*, 121).

Similarly Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*(1966) retells the narrative of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*(1847); in which the colonized West Indian mad woman, silenced in Bronte’s novel, is ‘given a voice’ and ‘allowed’ to tell the story from her unique perspective.

Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (1976) details the colonization of an Eastern enclave in Nigeria. The novel concludes with the District Commissioner’s resolve to write a book entitled: “The Pacification of the Tribes of the Lower Niger.” He decides to devote: “ not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph” to the plight of the major protagonist Okonkwo. (Chapter 25). Here the District Commissioner seeks to control our perception of the colonialist experience. His decision to ‘devote only a reasonable paragraph’ to the plight of the major protagonist Okonkwo in his proposed book; means that he controls the colonial Mega- Narrative. His ‘truth’ of the colonial experience will be perceived as the truth.

But Achebe's very awareness of his character's mindset ensures that the colonized has the last word. In his satirical characterization of the District Commissioner's attempt to dominate the story of the colonial experience; the author/former colonized, tells his own story; his truth of the colonial experience. Achebe's truth thus becomes 'the dominant truth'.

But is this the truth? Did Achebe in presenting his own people's narrative, tell the whole truth of his society? The truth of how 'the rain and the reign began to beat them'? ¹¹ The very title of Achebe's novel- *Things Fall Apart*- is culled from Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming'(1919); wherein the beast of evil encroaches on the world as a 'Spiritus Mundi'; a spirit of the world.

In line with Yeats' concept of the gyre : "the idea that history occurs in cycles . . . Yeats imagines a Christian era giving way apocalyptically to an era ruled by a godlike desert beast". (Nicholas Meihuizen. 'The nature of the beast: Yeats and the shadow', 1994). Yeats' poem reflects a "collective unconscious" response to evil's inevitable triumph over good and God. It is a poem which distills the general narrative of 'the mega of evil' encroaching on the world in a bid to assert the supremacy of evil.

In other words, whereas Yeats writes in universalistic terms of man's impotence against recurring evil in the world, Achebe's novel specifically defines that evil as colonialism; a "beast" that stealthily encroaches on the "good" of traditional Igbo society. As such, Achebe himself,

¹¹ (See Lizi Ben-Iheanacho's review of Ugochukwu Agballah's novel: *Where the Rain Started Beating Us*—in which she states: "The phrase and title of this book is derived from an Igbo adage which says that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body; made popular by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*. It is often the assumption in African sociocultural and political discourse that 'the rain' started to beat Africa with her 'discovery' by Europe spanning through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the Berlin Conference of 1885."DAILY TRUST--Saturday, September 15, 2018 Published Date Aug 4, 2018 1: 16 AM).

wittingly or unwittingly, gives credence to another universal Mega -Narrative: the ever-present conflict between Good/Truth and Evil/Falsehood.

It is a ‘universalistic cyclical notion’ which again surfaces in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. (2004). Here, Achebe’s “colonial beast” rears its head this time in modern-day Nigeria, in the person and home of Eugene. Eugene’s evil is similar to that of the colonialists of yore. He physically brutalizes his family. He uses religion to subjugate them and to “mentally colonize” them.

In the public sphere, Adichie depicts another variant of colonialism in the form of the Nigerian government seeking to “colonize” Nigerians. The government uses its power to kill journalists whose writings tell the people a truth different from its own fabricated truths. University lecturers like Auntie Ifeoma who rebel against this new/old form of colonial bestiality feel compelled to flee Nigeria for the United States.

This decision causes her friend Chiaku to comment with what can be regarded as a “universalistic mega narrative statement”: “The educated ones leave, the ones with the potential to right the wrongs. They leave the weak behind. The tyrants continue to reign because the weak cannot resist. Do you not see that it is a cycle? Who will break that cycle?” (*Purple Hibiscus*, 244/245).

‘NOVELISTIC’ SETTINGS OF MEGA CITIES

The writers of mega city fiction appear intent on ‘breaking that cycle’. In the main, they perceive the mega city as a mega tyrant imposing itself on its citizens; brutalizing them in a variety of

dimensions. As such, the writers “try to right the wrongs” arising from perceptions of their abode and locations as it impacts on their creations and characters.

Although I refer to mega city novels set in London and Shanghai ; my focus is on Lagos which features many works of fiction ; among them: Simi Bedford’s *Yoruba Girl Dancing* (1992); Luke Williams’ *The Echo Chamber*(2011); Will Ferguson’s *419*(2012); Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*(1960); Ben Okri’s *Dangerous Love*(2011); Teju Cole’s *Everyday is for the Thief* (2015); Karen King-Aribisala’s *The Hangman’s Game*(2009); and El Nukoya’s *The Baron of Broad Street*(2011).

The mega city of Victorian London in which Charles Dickens locates many of his novels is a setting of slums where pick-pockets and prostitutes abound. It is a city where the poverty-stricken and hungry Oliver Twist makes the famously unpardonable demand: “Please Sir, can I have some more?”

It is a mega city of “hard times” where factories emit dangerous fumes to the populace; where child-labour is rampant; where the houses are covered in grime; and where social stratification is the order of the day.

London is, in fact, ‘a tale of two cities,’ where the rich and the poor are sharply differentiated:

Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless, starving wretch to lay him down and die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world. (*Oliver Twist*; Chapter 23).

In the London of the twenty first century, every day is Saturday in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005). The protagonist, Henry Perowne's dreams of spending a quiet evening with his family are violently assaulted by his witnessing of globally-charged issues, evident in the large demonstrations against the United States' invasion of Iraq. When he sees a plane's firing engine in the sky, he believes that he is about to experience another 9/11 terrorist attack; this time not in New York but London: "The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable." (*Saturday*, 276). Henry is so overwhelmed by the actual and imagined violence around him, that his son Theo tells him:

When we go on about the big things, the political situation, global warming, world poverty, it all looks really terrible, with nothing getting better, nothing to look forward to. But when I think closer in- you know, a girl I've just met, or this song I'm going to do with Chas, or snowboarding next month, then it looks great. So this is going to be my motto- think small. (*Saturday*, 35).

Like the mega city of Victorian and modern-day London; Lagos is 'a bitter world' of violence in various dimensions. As depicted by Leye Adenle in his novel, *Easy Motion Tourist* (2016), Lagos is a mega city that appears to sanction an "immoral morality." Amaka, the protagonist, is a wealthy young woman determined to protect and safeguard the lives of prostitutes. Nevertheless, she poisons and attempts to murder abusive 'big men' with an alarming lack of conscience. The novel is replete with scenes of violence, mutilation of body parts, gang violence and police brutality.

In the collection of short stories, *Lagos Noir* (2018), which all in all: "create an uncharted path through the center of Lagos and out to its peripheries, revealing so much more truth at the heart

of this tremendous city than any guidebook, TV show, film, or book you are likely to find,” (*Lagos Noir*: Introduction); Lagos is predictably a “dark city” where one has to: “Just Ignore And Try To Endure.” That happens to be the title of Igoni Barrett’s story. He describes Lagos as:

a city of rats- they far outnumber the twenty million human inhabitants. They live in our homes, feed better than we do on our waste, and adapt more quickly to the poisons and anthropogenic microbes wiping us off the earth. Even today no map of Lagos would be complete without a rat’s-eye view of the garbage landfills and trash-choked canals, the mechanic workshops bursting with metallic skeletons dusted in rust. . . The rotting underbelly of the city we built for the rats.”(Igoni Barrett “Just Ignore And Try To Endure,” *Lagos Noir*).

As depicted by the above writers, mega cities are “shrouded in negativities.” Regardless of century and place, mega cities are perceived as filthy environments beset by poverty and crime. Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* in particular, emphasizes the constant bombardment of chaos and lunacy associated with mega city life; which leads the protagonist’s son to declare that ‘small’ is preferable to mega big.

Moreover the mega city is equated with class divides. In “Eden” by Uche Okonkwo(*Lagos Noir*) the children Madu and Ifechi observe both : “the noise and grime of Obalende” and : “ Ikoyi’s genteel influence; the streets are: “ quieter, with actual sidewalks and streetlights that mostly worked.” Madu: “liked to imagine that the oyinbos were never able to go beyond the secretariat.

That if they tried, some unseen, all-powerful barrier would literally stop them, and they would turn around and walk their dogs back to Ikoyi.”

To Jude Dibia the Lagos mega city is: “not the make-believe utopia” it is purported to be; in spite of the scenes of ‘rich people’s children ‘riding fancy bicycles, playing basketball’ with “nannies and gatemen” in tow-- “Complete darkness came swiftly. Lagos nights could be unforgiving.” (“What They Did That Night”, *Lagos Noir*).

Chika Unigwe’s Lagos is dangerous; a city where his protagonist Emeka an okada driver isn’t: “sure that he could handle putting his life in danger—Lagos drivers drove like madmen—every day.”(“Heaven’s Gate”, *Lagos Noir*). Indeed, horrific traffic situations are often highlighted in Lagos mega city fiction. The vehicles themselves becoming a symbolic narratological feature of mega city life.

Here Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s song “Shuffering and Shmiling” is pertinent:

Every day my people dey inside bus

Shuffering and shmiling

Forty-nine sitting, ninety-nine standing

Shuffering and shmiling

Dem go pack dem self in like sardine

Shuffering and shmiling. (*King of Afrobeat: The Anthology*. Barclay, 1999.).

This ‘suffering and smiling’ response to Lagos life illustrates a certain acceptance of the status quo. It also reveals the need ‘to smile’ in the face of suffering, evoked by mega cities.

This penchant, however, fuels creativity. It is almost as if the city compels the writing and creation of stories. These stories become ‘life-giving forces;’ especially significant, because vehicles such as the “molues” are associated with death. They: “have become known among commuters as “moving morgues,” and danfos as “flying coffins.” (BBC Report “On the buses in Lagos,” 2007).

Moreover, writers often employ vehicles as metaphorical representations of Lagos. As such the vehicles are stories in themselves. For example Chris Abani in his novel *Graceland* (2004) describes “molues” in the following manner:

Molues were buses unique to Lagos, and only that place could have devised such a hybrid vehicle, its “magic” the only thing keeping it from falling apart. The cab of the bus was imported from Britain, one of the Bedford series. The chassis of the body came from surplus Japanese army trucks trashed after the Second World War. The body of the coach was built from scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned. (8-9).

In this description, the “molue’s” identity is firmly entrenched in Lagos. The buses are made from: “scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned.” Thereby, the creativity of Lagosians is evidenced in their utilization of “waste materials.” They use these old things to create new things.

Lagosians also enhance their creations in the utilization of foreign products from Britain and Japan. This synthesis reflects metaphorically, a certain unified narrative, for the localized indigenous narrative combines with a more international mega narrative of integration. This unifying “magic” is: “the only thing keeping (the bus/society) from falling apart.” (8-9).

However, “Things only fall apart” when Nigeria’s leadership is corrupt. As Daria Tunca observes of Ben Okri’s *Stars of a New Curfew*, (1999): “the Lagos bus is associated with being made of disparate parts and works effectively until the nation/commuters are “taken over by the madness of its leaders.” (Daria Tunca, “Nigeria is Bus is Stage”: The Bus as Metaphor in Contemporary Nigerian Literature.” 2008). In this regard, Lagos is viewed as a microcosm of Nigeria. There is a suggestion that if Lagos can be transformed, Nigeria itself will likewise triumph over its shortcomings. The writers appear to be committed to exposing the challenges of mega cities. Their works in the main highlight the travails of mega cities. They emphasize the danger, over-crowding, social stratification, corruption, injustice, poverty, violence, prostitution and crime. In their writings, the mega city is the place where everyone is either a criminal or has the potential to become one.

PLOTS OF MEGA CITY NOVELS

Mega city writers create characters who, while lured by the opportunities the city offers its inhabitants, nevertheless discover that its allures and bright lights are all a ruse when they are confronted with the overwhelmingly negative realities of urban life.

In Tash Aw’s *Five Star Billionaire* (2013), for instance, the Malaysian characters are lured by the attractions of the mega city of Shanghai into believing the city will change their lives dramatically for the better. But the city is merely an illusion. The mega city is as deceptive as the “good fake” designer bags of one of the characters, Phoebe. As such, the plots of novels based on mega cities are often informed by the need to circumvent the many ‘evils’ of the city.

In Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), a group of young men try to 'interpret' and make sense of the bribery and corruption, as well as the hypocrisy and nepotism that has become an intrinsic part of Lagos society. So embedded is this in Lagos society that the task of navigating the moral terrain of the city becomes herculean. A certain Mega -Narrative ideal is however realized at the novels' conclusion. 'The interpreters' attend an art exhibition and align themselves with gods of the Yoruba pantheon. Theirs is an attempt to synthesize their old traditionalist belief-systems with the new challenges and ideologies they face.

Art, the creative impulse, is upheld here as a formalizing force; the means to 'accommodate' the mega city which inspires 'mega dreams,' only for them to be thwarted. At the very onset of the novel, Sekoni, perhaps the most profound of *The Interpreters*, tells Egbo of the need to: "accept the universal dome, because there is no direction. The bridge is the dome of religion and bridges don't just go from here to there; a bridge also faces backwards." (*The Interpreters*, 9; stammering removed from quote).

The suggestion here is that Sekoni, who stammers, subscribes to universalistic mega ideals of bridging the past with the future in order to understand his present. The very fact that he stammers reflects the difficulties in arriving at this ideal.

The Lagos of Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1975) features a prostitute as its main protagonist. Named after the British Jaguar car, she is the embodiment of the predatory nature of the mega city. This is exemplified by her using her sexuality to manipulate men; in the fulfilment of her materialistic desires. Ekwensi transforms this "mega narrative of human degradation," typified

by the mega city, with his employment of vehicle symbolism. Jagua Nana, jaguar the car and jaguar the animal all provide vivid images of the wild, predatory and destructive force and speed of the mega city. Nevertheless, Ekwensi's eventual alignment of these with bicycles and canoes suggests that the inherent tendency of the mega city to destroy its inhabitants can be alleviated by "a return" to a slower pace of life more in tune with rural areas.

What we have, in effect, as depicted in novels such as Leye Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist* and Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, is not merely an examination of prostitution as a feature of the mega city, but more significantly 'the prostitution of the souls' of those who inhabit mega cities. In these cities, moral values, morals are "sold" for money, economic advantage and fame and fortune.

YEARNING FOR SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT

The very titles and content of "mega city fiction" reveal a yearning for a "positive mega narrative" that will empower the lives of the characters. Novels such as Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), express the hope of the protagonist for a wonderland. She is seen searching for a positive evaluation of Nigerian cities, among them Lagos.

Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) evokes a quest for a land of spiritual grace denied its protagonist; a young teenager called Elvis. Elvis, named after the American entertainer Elvis Presley, lives in Maroko; a Lagos slum. Donning a wig and painting his face white; he frequents Bar Beach to entertain tourists in his Elvis Presley persona. Under the guise of helping him navigate the mega city, Elvis is subjected to the manipulation of Redeemer; a misnomer for Elvis

becomes embroiled in drug trafficking and the smuggling of body parts. He succumbs to the criminal world around him, denied the grace he so much craves. He only receives redemption on his outward journey to America, leaving Lagos with a new name: Redemption. This name implies a new sense of “spiritual redemption,” in contrast with that afforded him by his friend, Redeemer, who embodies a false “materialistic redemption.”

A sense of “spiritual loss” is also evident in Toni Kan’s *The Carnivorous City* (2016) where the main protagonist Abel, a lecturer in Asaba, rushes to Lagos on hearing that his younger brother Soni, a gangster type persona, is missing. Lagos for him becomes a carnivore which actively consumes his morals and ethics. He struggles with his growing desire for his brother’s beautiful wife, and he strives to stave off the crime and violence which permeates this mega city. Significantly, Kan names his main protagonist Abel, which brings to mind the biblical character of the Cain and Abel story where Cain ended up by murdering Abel. (Genesis 4:1-26). Thereby, the writer emphasizes implicitly the mega city’s tendency to destroy relationships. Brotherhood, at once universal and familial, is destroyed by the carnivorous nature of the mega city.

‘MEGA IDEALS’ OF LOVE AND HEALING

In these Lagos mega city novels, the overall mega ideal is literally eaten up carnivorously. There is a “prostitution of the human spirit/soul,” resulting in a sense of loss. As such, writers of mega city fiction make it their business to assert a “healing positive” alternative for their characters. They subscribe to such universal Mega- Narrative ideals as love, friendship, unity and charity; in a bid to counter the selfishness and greed which is perceived as typifying mega city life.

In Chibundu Onuzo’s *Welcome to Lagos* (2018), the characters, all fleeing physical and “emotional violence,” escape to Lagos. Although they lack money and societal connections, they remain together and live in the hope of dramatically changing their lot. They move into an

abandoned building. Rather fortuitously, they discover a large amount of stolen money and decide to use it to help in the building of schools in order to help “the masses.” At night, they listen to readings of the bible. So doing, they adhere actively to a Mega- Narrative of constructively and morally transforming their community. Since these characters are from different ethnic groups, the writer further pursues a Mega- Narrative principle that there can be “unity in diversity;” that in spite of our ethnic differences, we can and should work together for the common good.

In her review of the novel, Lovia Gyarkye voices her disappointment with its conclusion; stating that in mega city novels, the writer is required to “navigate:” “between the interplay of individual stories while preserving the city’s character.” But on the novel’s conclusion: “Onuzo has split her narrative into too many parts. The band of characters we met at the beginning has been lost in the crowd.” (*The New York Times*, 2018). The feeling here is that the characters have been claimed by the crowd even as they claim their own unity. They express a certain commitment to working together in harmony for the benefit of all.

The very title of Seffi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), suggests the hope that “the bad” associated with Lagos mega city life; will eventually be overturned by the “good.” Here, friendship between the chief-protagonists, Sheri and Enitan, is upheld as a force which can withstand the violence of isolation, rape, skewed religious ideology, and the social, political and military dictatorships to which the country, as represented here by Lagos, is subjected. These are ‘dictatorial forces’ which metaphorically and actually, try to impact negatively on their friendship.

The Lagos of Chimamanda Adiche's *Americanah* (2013) is a city where love can and does flourish. This is evident in the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu. In spite of the backdrop of the violence of various military governments, and the vogue of relationships based on materialism, where: "the first rule of life in this Lagos" is "you do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you" (81); Obinze and Ifemelu and, indeed, the 'moral terrain' of the city itself are empowered by love.

This "mega narrative of love" as the means to offset the negativities of mega city life, is also privileged in *Love's Persuasion* (2014) by Ola Awonubi. Here two characters, Tooni and Ada, with different socio-economic backgrounds, are nevertheless united in love; especially through their love for books. This love for books emphasizes a shared ideology which enables their relationship to thrive despite the deleterious social divides equated with the mega city.

Thus in the majority of these mega city narratives, the writers share a common mega narrative ideal. Their writings attest to the notion that, although mega city locations are fertile grounds for the expression of the very worst of human emotions and activities; they are nevertheless prime locations where the mega narrative of good and of love and friendship between peoples has the potential to flourish.

MEGA NARRATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY LOST

In many cases, "mega narrative ideals" are associated with rural locations where people live integrated lives; where they care for and love one another in friendship; and where they are united in faith, culture and traditions. But with the movement from rural locations to urban mega cities and even city locations; these communal "good values" are destroyed. Put another way, writers of mega city fiction seem to give credence to the mega narrative of "the community lost;"

a narrative which features in virtually every culture and religion wherein a harmonious rural way of life is lost to the community.

As a result of industry, science, technology and urbanization, the “folk” move to urban areas only to become fragmented. They end up living in anonymity. As Christian Smith observes: “The task of those who see clearly now is to memorialize and celebrate folk community, mourn its ruin, and resist and denounce the depravities of modern, scientific rationalism that would kill the Human Spirit.” (Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*: 85/86).

Thus, literature across the ages reveals what can be referred to as a “mega narrative concern” where the mega dominating dream of pursuing a life of “bigness” associated with the advanced industrialization and technological prowess of mega cities has eroded a former “pastoral little story” and a “better little life.” A commentator avers that: “The classic African novel has always idealised the village, mostly casting it as the repository of order and tradition; while the city is portrayed as its antithesis: chaotic and corrupt, if not downright evil. It is a contest of worldviews: the modern versus the traditional, the foreign versus the indigenous, the old against the new.” (*The Guardian*: 2017).

However, this notion is not restricted to Africans but is word wide and worldwide. In his critical work, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), Leo Marx comments on the technological/pastoral dichotomy of nineteenth century American society; a dichotomy also expressed in the literature. A machine has metaphorically entered the Biblical Garden of Eden. The material life, the machine and the spiritual pastoral life,

emblematic of the Garden of Eden, are all in conflict. The machine transformed a continent and negatively impacted on the communal and individual lives of people.

“Within the lifetime of a single generation,” Marx observes:

a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance. Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent image of the machine's sudden entrance onto the landscape. (*The Machine in the Garden*, 343).

According to Marx, the dominance of machine technology highlighted the contradictions of American culture; for America's essentially “pastoral ideal” of liberty, conflicted with its new personality as an industrial power. (*The Machine in the Garden*, 26). The purpose of literature, Marx insists, is to reveal the “contradiction” of American commitment to pastoral wellbeing, and its commitment to “productivity, wealth, and power” equated with machine technology. (*The Machine in the Garden*, 226).

It is that “conflicted sense of purpose,” emanating from life before the machine, technology, the mega city and the actual life of the mega city, which are of concern here.

Mega cities, seen as havens of liberty, often become “prisons.” There is a sense that the mega city, while forging a new community, nevertheless harks back to an idealistic longing for a community lost; a community of “rural harmony.” This situation gives rise to “dialectical tension” which pervades as, Marx terms it, “the landscape of the psyche” where social realities

intrude into this dream and where: “our inherited symbols of order and beauty have been divested of meaning.”¹²

This situation applies to the literature of mega cities. As presented by the writers, mega cities engender a sense of hopelessness in the majority of the population. Life becomes ‘meaningless’ because we have lost “our inherited symbols of order and beauty.” The scientific and technological prowess usually equated with the mega city is deemed culpable for this state of affairs. Indeed, it would appear that the mega science narrative usually associated with technology is in conflict with the mega humanities narrative; each presenting its truth as to how universalistic ideals of love, friendship and integration can become a reality.

However both the Sciences and the Humanities emphasize a common angst, each combating the overwhelming negativities associated with mega cities. These include urban sprawls, slums, gentrification and the competition for scarce resources. Both narratives appear to be committed to alleviating the dire circumstances often created by mega cities. Both also give rise to the need to organize society in accordance with shared Mega- Narrative ideals.

Both narratives acknowledge the urgency of adopting a united universal framework; a Mega-Narrative that can and should direct lives. This is because the mega narrative can be regarded as the means to find: “common themes. . . reflect(ing) broader and deeper rules we write across time and space and culture about who we are, how we behave, and what is possible in our world.” (Eric Selbin, 50).

SCIENCE FICTION AND THE DANGERS OF A TECHNOLOGICAL MEGA NARRATIVE

¹² See my Inaugural lecture: *Destination Freedom: Vehicle Symbolism in Black Literature* (2012)-where I discuss the impact of vehicles, machines in Black Literature.

What exactly is possible in our world? Is the humanistic mega narrative ideal of love, friendship and unity in diversity a realizable truth? Given the digital age where technological mega might has the capacity both to disempower and empower; to falsify and to tell the truth of our existence; the Mega- Narrative of universal good is used, more often than not, to manipulate facts. It is used to deceive and disempower, especially in this day and age when modern technology allows for widespread dissemination of information and lies at speeds hitherto unknown.

A case in point is the internet technology where the Yahoo Search Engine “silently” influences lives and controls situations the world over by determining and defining authoritatively our conception of the truth. Here, literature and technology unite in an almost pernicious and sinister manner. The name, Yahoo, is culled from Jonathan Swift’s satirical novel *Gulliver’s Travels* (1899); a proto Science Fiction work “written and published during years of cultural turmoil.”¹³ The protagonist, Captain Gulliver, finds himself marooned in various alien cultures and lands; the writer employing this “technique” to enable us to see our differences with alien societies, as well as provide us with the means to reflect about our own societies.

In Book IV, entitled: “A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms,” Gulliver encounters two races. The one are the Houyhnhnms; a race of intelligent horses so innocent that they are unable to understand such “concepts” as telling lies or fighting wars. The other race Gulliver encounters are the Yahoos; a race of savage humanoid creatures. Their violence to each other, representing all that is bad about human beings.

In other words, the “mega narrative of technology” is currently being used to “govern” our morals and value-systems negatively. Even as we apply the Yahoo search engine in our quest for

¹³ *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction; 2018.*

knowledge and truth, we are more often than not, unconsciously subjecting ourselves to a governing narrative of violence as symbolized by the concept of the Yahoo. Through the World Wide Web, we are “interneting” ourselves with the negative attributes of the human race.¹⁴

SCIENCE FICTION

As if conscious of this duplicity, Science Fiction writers respond and even “write back” to the “mega narrative empire of technology.” They construct:

a revolutionary bricolage, a vocabulary of words and concepts from a variety of sources forged. . . into some sort of practical ideology with which they confront the inequities and exigencies of their time and place, crafting new stories, new visions out of old, while retaining important contextual links to the past . . . which confronts the present and reaches out to the future.”(Eric Selbin, 41).¹⁵

Science Fiction indeed, can be regarded as a genre which imaginatively portrays the future of humanity. It synthesizes science and technological knowhow in a humanistic fictional manner. Not surprisingly, much of science fiction features mega city states. For they are associated with industrialization and technological mega might. This makes them prime locations for the examination of mega narrative universal ideals, particularly in this technological age.

One of such Science Fiction narratives is Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* (2014), which is regarded as something of a novelty in African literature. Okorafor believes that if Africans embrace science fiction, there will be: “an increase in imagination, a greater tolerance for and a greater interest in ideas, spiritualities, religions, people who are unlike the norm, greater social awareness, more

¹⁴ ***Ironically, I have used the Yahoo Search Engine to discover the ‘truth of this deception.’.***

¹⁵ Eric Selbin’s observations are with reference to ‘revolutionary novels’.

worldly individuals and new and innovative technologies born from within the continent.” (qtd. in Onifade, 2015).

In the novel itself, supernatural aliens invade Lagos. They employ their special ‘technological and spiritual powers’ to change the inept leadership and corruption of Nigeria, of which Lagos is a microcosm. Moreover, the folkloric story-telling spider, Udide Okwankam, is credited by the author as telling the story. In this guise, the author utilizes an indigenous being to transform the status quo. She also simultaneously creates a ‘localized narrative’ to support the mega narrative theme of “welcoming earthly integration.”

Thus, it is suggested that the alienation of the “mega city world” can be addressed by utilizing our own cultures. Indigenous cultures can, in turn, be unified with other world cultures for mutual benefit. In short, the universal mega narrative of “unity in diversity” is expressed through the medium of science fiction.

While Okafor’s novel addresses positively “the evils of mega cities” wherein science and technology can be effectively harmonized with the “spiritual, psychic dimensions” of human beings, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) are chilling warnings against the adoption of Mega Narratives; overarching theories of governing ourselves.

Set in the Republic of Gilead, a futuristic mega state-comprising the whole of the United States of America, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) is variously regarded as science fiction, dystopia or speculative fiction. Atwood herself perceives of her novel as speculative

fiction. She argues that the events of the novel could conceivably occur in the future without regard to advanced technology.¹⁶

Gilead is governed by a theocratic military dictatorship. Although named Gilead, the truth of the “balm of Gilead” is not a spiritual/Biblical universal cure as it signifies in figurative speech,¹⁷ but a far-reaching “mega narrative disease” that “contaminates” the populace, especially women. Having jettisoned the United States Constitution, the male-dominated Republic strictly forbids women from engaging in any activity not in keeping with its “fundamentalist religious laws.” Women are prevented from reading, voting, holding money, seeking employment or buying property. This patriarchal society rigidly interprets Biblical doctrine. It believes women are the property of men.

The protagonist, Offred, is so-called because she is “owned” by her master the Commander whose name is Fred. She and other handmaidens have a singular function; to produce children for the benefit of the society.

This “law” is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Between 1933-1939, the totalitarian state of Nazi Germany dictated a similar ethos for women. German women were expected to produce as many children as possible to secure the future of the Aryan race. Accordingly, Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, declared: “The mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world.” Hitler even encouraged women to reproduce by giving them an award called “the Mother’s Cross.”¹⁸

¹⁶ See Jennifer Keishin Armstrong; Why The Handmaid’s Tale is so relevant today; BBC CULTURE 25 April 2018.

¹⁷ **Balm of Gilead was a rare perfume used medicinally, that was mentioned in the Bible, and named for the region of Gilead, where it was produced. The expression stems from William Tyndale’s language in the King James Bible of 1611, and has come to signify a universal cure in figurative speech. (Wikipedia).**

¹⁸ **See Bitesize: BBC: Life in Nazi Germany 1933-1939 - OCR B WEB).**

In effect, Atwood's novel warns against the danger of the Mega- Narrative. In her novel, the Mega- Narrative is used to depersonalize and dehumanize women. The patriarchal society places women in various subservient and demeaning categories. They are either wives, aunts, or handmaidens. Their "personal identities" are nullified. For they are perceived as "bodies" whose function is to "serve the mega narrative of the patriarchal state." Furthermore, they employ Biblical doctrine to support their prejudices. In this regard, they are no different from the colonialists. While the latter subjugate peoples with the Bible and the sword/violence; Gilead's leaders subjugate their female population with the Bible. Now, the new sword or violence is technology, which is employed to change dates, information and personal identities.

But Offred clings tenaciously to her “sense of self.” The novel concludes with a promise of escape not only from her society; but from the Mega -Narrative which has “imprisoned” her for so long. Indeed, the novel emphasizes her escape from that negative mega narrative by providing the reader with two conclusions. The first is Offred’s physical escape from the Commander’s house. Offred is uncertain whether she will realize freedom. She has engaged in an illicit affair and wonders whether the men who come to take her away can be trusted. This conclusion of the novel’s events is offset by another ending which occurs some two hundred years later. We read of scholars discussing Offred’s transcript; a series of audiotapes in which she recorded her story. One of the fictional scholars, Professor Pieixoto, gives a paper entitled: “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” observing: “As for the ultimate fate of our narrator, it remains obscure.” (*The Handmaid’s Tale*, 225). However, the very fact that her individual narrative has been “saved” implies that she herself is a narrative that has triumphed. The “negative theocratic mega narrative” which strove to enthrall her beliefs is negated.

In this regard, Atwood, while denouncing the Christianity espoused by the leaders of Gilead, says: “that is human behavior, so you can't lay it down to religion. You can find the same in any power situation, such as politics or ideologies that purport to be atheist. . . it is not a question of religion making people behave badly. It is a question of human beings getting power and then wanting more of it.”¹⁹

¹⁹ See-Williams, Layton E. (25 April 2017).” Margaret Atwood on Christianity, ‘*The Handmaid’s Tale*,’ and What Faithful Activism Looks Like Today”. Sojourners. Retrieved 18 June 2017.

Atwood's summations feature in George Orwell's *1984*. It is a novel which again reveals the negative influence of Mega- Narratives. It examines:

the power that centralized storytelling can exert over anxious populations suffering from the dislocations of history, by offering scapegoats, easy fixes and simple cohesive narratives. If such narratives are riddled with lies, so much the better for those in power, who then succeed in redefining the daily reality inhabited by their subjects.”²⁰

As Michiko Kakutani observes:

The dystopia described in George Orwell's nearly 70-year-old novel “1984” suddenly feels all too familiar. A world in which Big Brother (or maybe the National Security Agency) is always listening in, and high-tech devices can eavesdrop in people's homes. . . A world in which the government insists that reality is not “something objective, external, existing in its own right.” (in *The New York Times: Critic's Notebook* (2017)). The novel is set in the mega city state of Oceania. The Party, led by Big Brother, subjects the population to “psychological violence.” They believe rightly that if they focus on brutalizing the minds and spirits of their subjects, they will secure “real power” over them.

In this vein, they deliberately associate two different qualities simultaneously, as determinants of truth.

This brings to mind Graham Greene's comments on his own novels; novels which are often set in the midst of “political instability:” “If I were to choose an epigraph for all the novels I have

²⁰ **(Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) a philosophical work analyzing Hitler's and Stalin's rise to power qtd. In Michiko Kakutani).**

written, it would be from Bishop Blougram's Apology: "Our interest is in the dangerous edge of things. The honest thief; the tender murderer; the superstitious atheist." (Graham Greene, *A Sort of Life*, 85).

Can a thief be honest? Can a murderer be tender? Can an atheist be superstitious?

Orwell's oligarchy promotes such fallacies. In the very first chapter of his novel, the slogans of The Party are "seen" on the walls of the Ministry of Truth. This says: "War is peace/freedom is slavery/ignorance is strength." (1984,6). As such, The Party creates its own reality. By employing these oxymora, it forces the populace to acknowledge and internalize contradictory notions as truth. Indeed, the Ministry of Truth is a Ministry of Deception. Here, documents of historical events are falsified. "Thought Criminals" are forced to express themselves in an adumbrated language called Newspeak. They are also required to "doublethink." This "doublethinking" is expressed, for example, in the notion that $2+2=5$ is true if the situation demands it. (1984, 349).

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The Ministry of Love, is in truth, The Ministry of Hatred. Its officials employ the 'Thought Police' to control the mind and will of the population. They torture them to ensure their love and fear of Big Brother and The Party; for the only type of love permitted in Oceania is the love of Big Brother.

This manipulation of the truth is designed to "kill the human spirit" and, if the "human spirit is

killed," the man is killed.

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As O'Brien tells Winston, the novel's central protagonist: "We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him... We make him one of us before we kill him." (1984, 321).

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Winston, who is targeted as a thought criminal for trying to discern the truth of the past and for engaging in an illicit affair is, in effect, sentenced to death. His death is not so much physical, as “psychological and spiritual.”

Like Atwood’s novel, Orwell’s *1984* concludes with scholarly remarks on the events of the actual story in an Appendix titled: “The Principles of Newspeak.” In this we are informed that this type of language: “was supposed to have become general by 2050, and yet it appears that it did not last that long, let alone triumph . . . perhaps the social and moral order it speaks for has even, somehow, been restored.” (1984, 376). This conclusion of the novel, emphasizes the ‘weaponization of language.’ Big Brother and The Party create the “language” of Newspeak, using it as a weapon to destroy good mega narrative principles, such as those embodied in “The American Declaration of Independence.”

“The American Declaration of Independence” reads: We do hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (1984, 392). Orwell suggests that, in the final analysis, these ideals cannot be adumbrated. They cannot be “killed” or overpowered by The Party’s negative mega narrative.

Perhaps the most sinister “technological presence” in this novel is Big Brother himself, the leader of the mega state. “Big Brother is always watching” everybody. His image dominates huge screens set in public arenas: in homes and offices. The main intention of this “device” is to induce fear in the populace by making them aware that they are constantly being watched and, therefore, cannot engage in “good” activities which are deemed rebellious to the state; to Big

Brother. As such they are governed by fear; fear of the negative mega narrative which thereby subjects them to its ethos.

BIG BROTHER; MEGA NARRATIVES; REALITY SHOWS

As we have seen, the negative mega narrative is rooted in deception. It is a narrative which manipulates language to obfuscate truth. The same process is evident in the current spate of reality shows today like “Big Brother.” In fact, their very designation as reality shows is falsehood. Rather than conveying reality, they are, like other art forms, orchestrated forms of reality.

Moreover, literature, as exemplified by George Orwell’s *1984*, is used to promote negative morals and value systems. The “mega narrative of reality shows” utilizes the concept of Big Brother to sanction deception and lies as determinants of prosperity and progress. In the televised Big Brother shows, a group of contestants are housed in a closed space. Their conversations can be heard and their actions viewed virtually 24/7. The contestants engage in a: “wildly complex contest of emotional intelligence and social manipulation- a game in which the winners . . . the players with the best understanding of interpersonal relationships and how to jockey for power without seeming like a threat engage in strategies. . . master classes in deception and subterfuge.”

As Calum Marsh notes, “Big Brother” is a show where the contestants have to: “strike the delicate invisible balance of truth and deception that will give them the best chance of surviving one another’s weekly votes.”²¹

²¹ **Calum Marsh, THRILLIST ENTERTAINMENT, 2018(Web).**

In the television quiz show called “The Chase,” contestants are pitted against “the Beast.” Both the contestants and “the Beast” are asked questions on politics, literature and current affairs. The purpose of “the game” is to determine whether the contestants are more knowledgeable than “the Beast.”

Significantly, ‘the Beast’ is presented as the mega repository of knowledge and truth. Since the Beast is associated with evil (Rev. 17: 7-18 & 13:11-18), the implication is that contestants and viewers alike are “orchestrated” to regard the Beast/evil as the dominant source of knowledge and truth.²²

Another reality show, “Would I lie to you?” privileges those who can tell the “best lie” for our entertainment: “The teams compete as each player reveals unusual facts and embarrassing personal tales for the evaluation of the opposing team. Some of these are true; some are not, and it is the panelists’ task to decide which is which.”²³

In most of these so-called reality shows, truth itself becomes a narrative, founded in deception. Even when “the truth of that deception” is named; as it is in the shows “Deception” and “Unreal.” It all seems to be a visual language game designed to distort the truth for entertainment purposes.

In this vein, the American television game-show, “The Moment of Truth,” based on the Colombian “Nada mas que la verdad” format (Nothing but the Truth), features contestants

²² **Wikipedia; The Chase: UK Game Show.**

²³ **Wikipedia –“Would I lie to you?” TV Series.**

answering embarrassing personal questions. If they answer truthfully, they receive cash prizes: if they lie they lose the money.

However, the show is actually not a truth-telling exercise, as it would have us believe. In the process of telling the truth, the contestants are coerced into hurting their friends and relatives. The prize-money is evaluated as truth. But money and wealth, as we have seen in the literature of mega cities, does not provide spiritual fulfillment.²⁴

CONCLUSION

Given the overwhelming negativities associated with the mega; with mega cities and mega narratives, how can we employ mega narratives for the benefit of humanity? We cannot do away with universal overarching belief systems. They guide and assist us in our inter-personal relationships for good or for ill. Can the much touted ideology of “unity within diversity” actually become a reality?

Literature, our narratives, should strive relentlessly to pursue the Mega- Narratives of our common humanity and destiny. Literature, as stated in the constitution of the Association of Nigerian Authors, should: “encourage the commitment of authors to the ideals of a humane and egalitarian society.” (Web).

This objective, while being specific to Nigerian writers, is a universal mega narrative ideal. As Joyce Cary remarks: “all novels are concerned from first to last with morality. . . All writers have,

²⁴ **Wikipedia: “The Moment of Truth”: US Game Show.**

and must have . . . some picture of the world, and of what is right and wrong in that world.” (Joyce Cary. *Art and Reality*, 149, 158).

Can the ideal of a humane and egalitarian society be envisaged in mega cities? Can it be realized in our global world?

As we have seen, the Mega- Narrative is essentially deleterious to the human race. In this digital age, it is especially inimical. The speed of accessing information is so rapid that one has insufficient time to truly ponder arguments, facts, and truths.

Moreover, the Western world is advantageously positioned to control and manipulate our lives and realities, given its access to superior technology. This makes the Mega-Narrative a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands, and the hands with even the best of intentions, are often the wrong hands. Even when a “micro narrative” asserts its own overarching belief-system, dangers also abound. This is because there are dangers in believing that the “micro” is better than the “mega.” The “micro” narrative can easily become another negative mega narrative.

There is a choice of being “ruled” by a good, positive, mega narrative or a bad, negative, mega narrative. Invariably, to suit our interests, we turn good narratives into bad narratives. In this regard, “might is right,” “mega is right.”

These presumptions promote violence. They lead to Christians killing Muslims; Muslims killing Christians; Protestants killing Catholics and Catholics killing Protestants. They lead to revolutions where ruling elites like the Russian Czars are murdered in the service of a communist mega narrative ideal. And so it continues.

What then is the answer to this ideological conflict and perpetual violence? We cannot as a human race be upheld by small structures or small “micro narratives.”

There is, in essence, a single universal mega narrative that is not political or ideological that is open to all without discrimination and which all can and should labour to uphold. That Mega - Narrative is the mega narrative of love. It is the Mega- Narrative of one loving “the other,” irrespective of whoever “the other” might be.

Our discussion began with the ways and means whereby we identify with story and narrative, whether oral or written. We ourselves are stories. We are individual and societal global mega city stories. Often, our stories are in conflict with each other even as they share certain universal truths.

Most of these stories, if not all, have been selfishly exploited to suit our own interests. Thus, it would seem that Lyotard’s notions of “incredulity towards mega narratives” should be upheld. As Matt Marino observes, we cannot: “see the Truths of some of our shared stories;” stories like: “modernity and the belief in human progress did not reveal the truth; the world was not better, a safer place for democracy to thrive.” (2018).

In this regard, we should rightly jettison Mega- Narratives. We should abandon Mega- Narratives; common universal principles which can unite us.

Nevertheless, as I have indicated, the literature of mega cities reveals an urgent need to discover both personally and societally, our connection with good mega narrative principles: “Whether it works or not, we continue to instinctively assemble narratives for ourselves and search for metanarrative to explain our place in the cosmos. We are convinced we are both part of

something larger and also, paradoxically, free to write our own story...even in light of the evidence that neither is working.” (Matt Marino, 2018).

Humanity is wired in such a way that “eternity is in our hearts.” (*Ecclesiastes* 3:11). We yearn for something more than ourselves; a mega something more than that which we physically see. This trait is evident in the writings of virtually every author of the mega city. Essentially writers perceive of the mega city as the world in microcosm. This mega city world strives for spiritual fulfillment on various levels.

As we have seen, writers of mega city fiction promote mega narrative ideals such as love, brotherhood, justice, equality, and social commitment to both indigenous and “universal locales.” So doing, they tell the truth of our existence. They utilize “weapons of mass construction” in the creation of a better mega city world.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

(Martin Luther King Jr. Speech delivered at the 11th Annual SCLC Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967).

Where do we go from here?

The late Martin Luther King Jr. Says:

I'm concerned about a better world. I'm concerned about justice; I'm concerned about brotherhood; I'm concerned about truth.

I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. For I have seen too much hate.

I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it, because John was right, God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality....

Where do we go from here?

The kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of capitalism, but in a higher synthesis. It is found in a higher synthesis that combines the truths of both. And so, I conclude by saying today that we have a task, and let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction. Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. Let us be dissatisfied until those who live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security. Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history, and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home. Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us be dissatisfied until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not on the basis of the color of their skin. Let us be dissatisfied. Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, "White Power!" when nobody will shout, "Black Power!" but everybody will talk about God's power and human power. Let us be dissatisfied until every state capitol will be housed by a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy, and who will walk humbly with his God. Let us be dissatisfied until

from every city hall, justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Let us be dissatisfied until that day when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid. Let us be dissatisfied, and men will recognize that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth.

Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. . .But difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future.... When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

The only Mega -Narrative worthy of our adherence is love; loving self and the other no matter our differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, country or nation. So, in this mega city of our lives, if we do not love each other as ourselves we die a mega death.

And so I, singing, say of, and to, this mega world of ours:

Deliver us from evil; deliver us from temptation; for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory; for ever and ever.

Amen.

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KAREN KING-ARIBISALA: A CITATION

KAREN KING- ARIBISALA: `MEGA PROFESSOR' FOR THE KEYNOTE AT THE MEGA CONVENTION

Many nations of the world have their own instances of foremost scholars. They also have a tradition of those rare men and women, who through their lives, work and services have towered above others of their own age, and have played commendable roles and contributed effectively to intellectual development. This is the class to which Professor Karen Ann King-Aribisala, [novelist](#) and short story writer belong.

Karen's background is symbolic of all those who encounter diversity. Though a Nigerian, she was born in Georgetown Guyana's capital, on South America's North East Atlantic coast, a country culturally connected to the English-speaking Caribbean region .

Karen's secondary and tertiary education was effected in many countries the world over; in Guyana, Barbados, England, Wales, and Nigeria -where she attended the International School of Ibadan in 1964; and in Rome Italy where she attended St. George's English School, Las Torta; and where she met her Nigerian husband Dr. Femi Aribisala at the age of fifteen. She obtained her B.A. (Honours) English Literature Upper Second Class acquired between October 1972 and June 1976 at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill, Bridgetown, Barbados, M.A. (Honours) English Literature which she bagged at the University of Leeds, Leeds, England between October 1976 and June 1977. She also crowned her academic effort with a PhD in African and West Indian Literature at the University of Sussex, Brighton, England between October 1978 and September 1981.

Karen Ann King-Aribisala's work experience spans several years of active teaching and research. Beginning from May 1982 to her present rank as a professor in the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria, she has taught Undergraduate courses such as West Indian Literature, Practical Criticism, The Victorian and Edwardian Novel, Introduction to the Short Story, Introduction to the Novel, Introduction to Poetry, The Moderns, Contemporary English Novel, Shakespeare, The Novel: Classifications and Techniques, Creative Writing, Victorian and Edwardian Poetry, Black American Literature and so forth.

At the post Graduate level, she has lectured such Postgraduate courses as West Indian Literature, History of Literary Theory and Criticism in addition to supervising several B.A. Projects, M.A., M.Phil., and PhD theses on West Indian,

African and Afro-American Literature. She has equally served as Contributing Editor of *Position: International Arts Review* edited by Dapo Adeniyi.

Some of the duties and responsibilities she has handled at the University of Lagos include Public Relations Officer for English Department; Secretary of Publications Committee for Faculty of Arts Conference on 'Issues of Borderlands in Africa' (March 17 – 30, 1985); Head of Publications Committee for Second Faculty of Arts Conference on, 'The Role of the Humanities in the Development of Nigeria,' (May 7 – 10, 1986), Patron and Advisor to student Drama Organization, Secretary for the University of Lagos Consult. Chairman –International Conference-- Literature and Nationalism University of Lagos-September 2004. Head of the Department of English: 2005-2006; 2006-2007; 2009-2010.

Apart from participating at conferences and international readings in various parts of the world, including India, Australia, the US, Malta and Canada; she is the recipient of several awards including 5 different awards for elocution and drama awarded by The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts – all with distinctions and merit between 1966 and 1969, Award of 'Best Actress' prize at the Theatre Guild of Guyana in 1972, the N.N.M.C. Award for Best First Book given to her book *Our Wife and other Stories* published in 1991, Regional Prize (Africa) for Best First Book awarded to *Our Wife and other Stories* in the Commonwealth Literature Prize; Toronto, Canada November 1991; Regional Prize (Africa) for Best Book awarded to *The Hangman's Game* published in 2008 and 2009 in the Commonwealth Literature Prize; this book was also short listed for the Guyana Prize for Literature and long listed for the IMPAC International Dublin Literary Award. She has also earned such prestigious fellowships as the James Mitchener Fellowship at the University of Miami Caribbean Writers Summer Institute (June – July 1993); represented Nigeria at ROMAPOESIA in Italy as a poet; she has obtained artistic residencies at the prestigious The Mac Dowell Colony, Yaddo, Djerassi Foundation and the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France; where she recited one of her poems at the Mayor's inauguration. She has equally served as conference participant and reader of fictional works and academic articles at a number of international conferences. She has received grants and scholarships from such bodies as the British Council, the Commonwealth Foundation; the Ford Foundation and the Ministry of Culture in Italy.

She has given readings of her creative work among them -Between November and December 1998- a Book Promotion Tour of her novel *Kicking Tongues* under the sponsorship of Heinemann, England as well as readings on the B.B.C., Birmingham University, and London. She has served as a judge and facilitator of creative writing at different times within and outside Nigeria.

Above all, Professor Karen who is blessed with much intellectual equipage had an imposing visibility in international scholarship with countless academic contributions. On top of that, several secondary and tertiary institutions within and outside the country have featured her works such as *Our Wife and Other Stories*, *Kicking Tongues*, *The Hangman's Game*, as required texts. Karen's most recent work of fiction is a short story collection-*Bitter Leafing Woman* published by Malthouse Press(2017).

Matthew Arnold an English poet once rightly classified the human society of his days into three main categories: a group consisting men and women, who chatter, love and hate, and in the end, die and are forgotten; a group comprising men and women, who like the ocean waves, bubble and foam in the realities of their societies; and another group, comprising men and women who accept the challenges of their time, strive earnestly, and eventually record impressive successes for their own generation and for posterity. Professor Karen Ann King-Aribisala certainly belongs to this third group. It is, therefore, perfectly fitting for the Association of Nigerian Authors to invite this mega professor to be the keynote speaker at the ANA Convention 2018 under the theme "Literature, Megacities and Mega-Narratives" in the mega city of Lagos.

