

Article

# Transgressed Spaces: Okey Ndibe and the Dynamics of Class Bordering

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## Abstract

*Borders do not only represent fixed and state-centred physical territories, they are also constructions of social life beneficial or detrimental to the individual, and to group cohesion. In literary studies, border poetics are mostly textual presentations and representations of social, cultural, or symbolic constructs that mediate or affect people's sense of collective belonging. Focusing on Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), We demonstrate how class subjectivity is constructed by the geo-economic and spatial logic of the city-space, and we read class borders as processes of socio-economic distinctions, and as managed institutions. We investigate acts of exploitation and social violence as systemic measures of class border management; a structural means of keeping the underprivileged at the margins. Secondly, we discuss bodies (corporeal and non-material) and voices as locations of successful or hindered border crossing. Finally, the paper suggests resilience and persuasive telling (voicing) as models for engaging socio-economically constructed identity for class debordering.*

**Keywords:** *Border poetics, class border, resistance, silence, body, voice*

## Introduction

Our interpretation of class through a border poetics lens, rather than through sociological, economic, or political models for understanding class, allows a concentrated focus on the details of belonging, crossings, and exchanges. This interpretative lens (border poetics), which is scarcely used in literary analysis and which combines the paradigms of border studies and border aesthetics, presents the materiality of identity performance. It envisions identity as an imaginary trajectory in order to capture the specifics of border making and border crossing; the complexities of occupying and crossing socio-spatial spaces. By projecting characters as actants on an imaginary identity landscape, border poetics accounts for different forms of movement and interaction between characters and the spaces they inhabit. It shows the border (symbolic and actual) as a fluid and complex form of social life, as the site of frictional exchange and possible transformative interaction. Border poetics, therefore, foregrounds literature's unique ability to reflect the entanglement of the different kinds of borders that define and constrain human experience. In this paper, a particular focus is placed on the class border that intensified after the Nigerian civil war as a result of democratic and military dictatorship.

Class difference underscores border management employed by and for the benefit of the elites or people who are included in the ambit of power. Political and economic privileges create divisions, analogous to palpable territorial border, between the upper class and the lower class, and between the government and citizens. According to David Newman, 'the 'here-there' and 'us-them' cut-off points

are not always played out through the construction of physical and visible walls and fences'. Newman believes that bordering is performed in the everyday inclusion and exclusion of 'different social, ethnic, economic or religious group' that separates the self from the other ('Borders and Bordering' 177). This paper, therefore, investigates daily practices and management of class differences and the extent to which such practices delineate the inclusion and exclusion of individuals to material wealth, privileges, and spaces. In some cases, these privileges have spatial materiality, in that they are performed in the physical spaces of habitation: the elites in reserved residential areas and the lower classes at the city periphery such as ghettos, shanties, slums and abandoned buildings in the inner city. In places or cities where there is insignificant residential segregation, where the classes cohabit within the same geographical space, the lower classes are still marked off as different and relegated to marginal positions by poverty, struggle, and other forms of deprivation.

Framing this difference through the lens of border poetics transcends mapping what and where class borders are. It interrogates how borders function in different settings. It considers class borders as dynamic spaces of socio-political habitation, thereby projecting the conscious processes of construction and management of borders. It foregrounds the extent to which, as border theorists hold, the state and the elites decide the rate of border permeability and control the politics of economic and political classification (Newman, 'Borders and Bordering' 175; Newman, 'The Lines' 148; Kolossov and Scott 5). It is the power elites who decide when, how, and for whom to open and close borders as well as how stringent movement across the border should be (Kolossov and Scott 5). The social space the text narrates echoes Frantz Fanon's 'Manichean World' where the societal managers coercively control and/or hinder border crossing between the economic and political hinterland to the mainland (41).

Based on the conceptual framework of the border as a site of controlled contacts, we read *Arrows of Rain* as a class border narrative in its representation of corrupt practices, military dictatorship, and sexual violence. We read these practices as both transgressive and systemic measures that reinforce adverse class borders and bordering. This reading resonates with Paasi's assertion that '[t]erritorial power and control manifest themselves not only in the border landscape but also in places, practices, and discourses in which violence, the possibility for violence or memories of violence are implicitly or explicitly present' (79). The text, through the narration of physical and social spaces of dominance and vulnerability, presents the violent performativity of border-making and crossing that has the potential of maintaining coded social difference. Transgressive practices such as rape and denial of voice are tools for socio-economic border control in the respective geographical and symbolic spaces of the city and interclass interface. On the flip side, this paper explores the strategies of bottom-up resistance to socio-spatial dominance and survival mechanisms emanating from the underprivileged. By exploring how storying and re-storying constitute forms of class bordering and border resistance, Ndibe reinstates the possibility of the individual contribution to social change.

## Delineating Socio-spatial Spaces

There is a clear consciousness in the location of both the text and the characters, which reinforces the activism import of the author and the text. Though set in a fictitious locale (Langa city in Madia), near similarity of the fictitious names to historical places – Langa for Lagos; Madia for Nigeria; B. Beach for the famous Bar Beach in Lagos – exposes the satirical import of the text, thus announcing its activism mission. The limited defamiliarized world in the text brings to bear the text's active engagement with socio-political differences, ridiculing political oppression and violence in Nigeria's post-civil war era. Furthermore, Ndibe fearlessly gives clues to the social issues he condemns by making apparent references to actual historical actors and dates. Except for the names of the major settings and the names of the characters, many historical coincidences in the novel reveal the novel's insistence on the truth of the time. For instance, he categorically states that the fictive country's independence was gained in 1960; a coincidence with Nigeria's date of independence, although 17 African countries gained independence in 1960. Other instances of direct reference to historical realities are his reference to Berlin and the Scramble for Africa, the extensive replication of the way Nigeria gained independence through the help of her intellectual elites, and the discovery of crude oil on the eve of the independence (*Arrows* 80–82). All these reflect Ndibe's desire to relate the truth of post-independent disillusionment that widened socio-political and economic distinction among citizens. He regrets that,

[t]he nation we inherited from the English was placed in the hands of politicians who sucked its blood until it became dry and anaemic. Overnight cabinet ministers puffed out protruding bellies they themselves called PP, for Power Paunch. What was left of Madia's swagger was a mere mask for impotence. (*Arrows* 81)

Ndibe's ability to straddle fictive and real worlds enhances its force against social injustice, thus making *Arrows of Rain* a masterpiece.

Set within a prolonged military rule of 1964 to 1988, the text narrates power dynamics and political domination from the personal experience of two central characters, Femi Adero, and Bukuru. Bukuru's story, presented as a letter, is framed by the overarching story of Femi, a journalist with the *Daily Chronicle*. Femi recounts a reporting duty that takes him to B. Beach on January 1, 1998, to interview people about the military Head of State's New Year proclamation of his life presidency. At the beach, instead of the interview, a dead prostitute's body becomes the centre of attraction. The graphic image of the dead body raped at B. Beach on a New Year's Day, 'too stark' (*Arrows* 3) to behold, sets the stage for interclass interaction that exposes the disparity between the political elites and the masses. In this scene, the detectives are presented as dutiful. The leader '[w]ithout interrupting his writing ... shouted orders at the other two detectives. They ran hither and thither, now clicking their cameras, now throwing tapes down to take measurements. The crowd observed these rituals from a safe distance' (*Arrows* 11). At first, one perceives a dichotomy between the detectives and the crowd in their respective active and passive functional relationship to the dead body. For the detectives, the semiotic markers of responsibility – to interview, scribble, run hither and thither, click cameras, throw tapes to measure – seem to portray state concern. But the narrator

immediately exposes the irony of this frantic effort by referring to the death as one of many, 'another unsolved death assigned a bureaucratic number and filed away somewhere, to gather dust, soon forgotten' (*Arrows* 11).

Discarding instantly any hope of solving the mystery of the deaths satirically disassociates the motives of the detectives from the action itself. It is typical of what Rick Eden calls the meiotic nature of satire, in which 'it supplies an unexpectedly diminished perspective on the antagonist' (593). According to Eden, satire 'accuses its antagonists of imposture, conscious or unconscious, duplicitous or deluded. ... [it] strips actions of any worthwhile purposes, denies the possibility of genuine engagement, and implies that they are calculated only to impress others' (593). By referring to the rape as 'one of many', filed away and forgotten, Ndibe not only calls attention to the incessancy of rape and political violence, but he also strips the detectives' action of its pretence. Satirically, Ndibe exposes the reality of his elite characters beyond what they appear to be. He criticizes the irresponsibility of the government which criminalizes prostitution in order to empower themselves to appropriate and objectify prostitutes.

In the course of the interview with the crowd, the detectives arrest Bukuru, who for two decades before the incident disguises himself as a madman and lives at the beach in flight from military persecution. He is overtly arrested on the count of proximity to the crime scene but covertly he is arrested for attesting before the crowd that the military are the perpetrators of the prevalent incidences of rape and murder of prostitutes at the beach. He tells the detectives that he witnessed the raping of the dead prostitute by six members of the vice task force. By implication, Bukuru's accusation of the military of rape is a confrontation with the state. His confrontation is an effort to reclaim agency and challenge the hegemonic border. It is a bottom-up pressure that has the possibility of affecting change but is constantly resisted by social managers. Hence, his confrontation enacts a moment of recognition in the detectives. An epistemological border crossing is enacted both in the detectives' recognition of themselves in the accused perpetrators and the recognition of the accuser (Bukuru) as a threat to hegemonic security.

Such recognition that troubles the unequal relationship of class difference quickly results in what Achille Mbembe, in his seminal idea of necropolitics, calls the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty' ('Necropolitics' 18). Examining the interclass challenge between Bukuru and the detectives and the consequence of Bukuru's challenge within the paradigm of necropolitics, that is, the social managers' power to decide who lives and who dies, one then understands the action of the detectives at the moment of this recognition. They see Bukuru as 'an attempt on [their] life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen [their] potential to life and security' (Mbembe 'Necropolitics' 18). Seeing the other from this angle of threatened power can be described as a hegemonic gaze that is automatically followed by a decision for the life or death of the other. And so, the detectives expedite the arrest and whisk Bukuru out of the crowd. Consequently, they force a topographical crossing from the beach to the court and later to the prison informed by the desire to silence and eliminate him. By this forced crossing, the text moves from exposing the state's negligence to condemning its tactful destruction of both the voice and the person of the less privileged, portraying a

nation in an era of social decay and political autocracy where the state is pitted against the citizens.

Besides the border implication of the above scene, material spaces such as the bus which the narrator (Femi) joins as he leaves the beach are spatial signifiers that represent coded social differences. The decayed and over-crowded space of the bus, the sweaty passengers, and the sales taking place within the bus depict the abject condition of the masses:

Then a rowdy contest for the passengers' attention developed between a travelling medicine salesman and an itinerant preacher. The salesman's ware included an antibiotic dubbed 'No more sufferhead' made by 'India's medical wizards', able to cure 'bad spirit and witch-craft, eczema, crawcraw, gonorrhea, syphilis, AIDS, watery sperm and dead penis'. It sold briskly. (*Arrows* 13-14)

The material condition of the bus reaffirms the social status of the occupants. The phrase, 'it sold briskly', foregrounds the state of the masses' health that makes them rush for a 'cure all' medication. The bus and its occupants contrast with the privileged space of the politicians in their lavish party at the house of the Minister for Social Issues, Reuben Ata. We see this space through Bukuru's eyes as he recounts his life as a journalist before his flight to the beach two decades before the narrative's present. According to him, the minister's house is 'large, high-ceilinged and brightly lit. The smell of food and cigar smoke filled the air. A band was playing blues ... a corner of the room where several cabinet ministers were seated ... The women sat on the ministers' laps or massaged their necks' (*Arrows* 112-113). The two physical spaces (the bus and the party house) semiotically mark the respective social conditions of the poor and the rich, the commoners and the political elite. They represent an inequality that is engraved in the everyday lives and spaces of the city.

Border poetics allows us a critical look at how symbolic differences are created, negotiated, and crossed. Foregrounding the relationship between characters in material spaces such as the beach, the bus, and the party house reveals the nuances of everyday interclass interaction, where the negotiation of identity is complexly predetermined and controlled. In the spaces, such as the party, where both classes physically exist together, they nevertheless exist differently in correspondence to their social locations and needs. In the party, admittance for Bukuru and the prostitutes is envisioned as a privilege. For the latter (prostitutes), the struggle to gain entrance is at the cost of one's life. The host, Minister Reuben Ata, tells Bukuru: 'Every girl in town wants to gatecrash my party.... [f]ive months ago one lady died outside my gate.' [His] face came alive with pride. 'Competition to get into Ata's party. This is the biggest party in town' (*Arrows* 115). Also, Bukuru's admittance, at the invitation of the Minister, is an assisted trans-boundary crossing. It is an indirect strategy to silence his journalistic criticism of the government.

Furthermore, the party reveals the corporeal aspects of interclass bordering; the bodies of both prostitutes and ministers commingling in intimacy at different physical levels: '[m]ost of the men were stout and middle-aged, all the women young and lithe' (*Arrows* 112/113). Symbolically, as well as functionally, the

prostitutes' bodies are tools for sexual gratification for the men. According to Minister,

It's not easy being a minister ... Members of the cabinet gave me the mandate to throw parties. My colleagues come here to forget all the problems in their ministry. And to recharge their batteries ... The ambassadors you see here will never send home a negative report about Madia. I make sure of that by giving them the most beautiful girls. (*Arrows* 117)

Thus, at the interstices of the corporeal border, (that of the ministers and the prostitutes) there is an unequal balance of power and affection symbolized both by their physical and class differences. In this interaction, the prostitutes are the 'them', whose bodies are transgressed, broken, and consumed for a purpose. Even though the sense of gate-crashing to gain entrance into the party presupposes free will on the part of the prostitutes, their choices are conditioned by societal pressures; they are victims of 'externally imposed processes of institutional exclusion' (Newman, 'On Borders and Power' 19) that lead to the 'impulsive decision' (*Arrows* 157) to compromise life. And though they are physically located in the same space as the ministers, they are very far from the system. They are both instrumentalised as battery chargers for the ministers and as sexual tools employed to achieve strategic and structural silencing of journalists and ambassadors.

Another important signifier that encapsulates social categorization is Ndibe's naming strategy. Kyallo Wadi Wamitila notes that 'characters' names, besides individualising the characters, have an important semantic, pragmatic, allusive and symbolic import that must be seen in the perspective of the overall structure of a particular work' (36). While Ndibe assigns full proper names to characters of state and political class such as President Isa Palat Bello, Prime Minister Asika Amin, Minister of Social Affairs Reuben Ata, the Judge, Justice Kayode, he connotes the social conditions of the ordinary masses using single and nicknames such as Lanky the lifeguard; Iyese, Violet, and Tay-Tay the prostitutes; Bukuru the madman. This technique gives an insight into the disparity in the presumed significance and status of the characters. Additionally, some of the ordinary characters' names indicate a form of split and distortion caused by prevailing social conditions. For instance, Bukuru whose actual name is Ogugua takes a disguised name 'Bukuru' when he escapes to the beach haunted by the dictatorial president who killed and murdered his (Bukuru's) mistress, Iyese. Also, Iyese chooses a prostitution-labelled name, Emilia to screen her real self from Bello and her other sex clients.

The deliberate splitting or distortion of identity by the less privileged characters is a survival tactic in social conditions where the vulnerable such as women, and prostitutes, are exploited by the upper class. Attesting to the significance of a double name for a prostitute, Iyese claims:

We [prostitutes] don't let *them* know our real names, when *we* have sex with *them* *we* don't let *them* touch our real bodies. A prostitute carries two spirits within her. With one she lives a normal life. A false name keeps our two spirits apart. If we didn't keep them separate, we might go mad.

Take me, for instance. My real name is Iyese. The name connects me to the spot where I was born. With it, I smile my true smiles ... and shed my real tears. It's the name with which I sigh at life.

As for Emilia, it's like a label on a loaf of bread. It is the name that takes the rapes of my body so that Iyese may go unhurt. (*Arrows* 132-133, my emphasis)

The emphasized pronouns 'we' and 'them' function as linguistic markers of categorization. Besides the representational value of these pronouns – 'we' representing the prostitutes and broadly speaking the vulnerable, 'them' signifying the socio-political elites – the staccato rhythm of the pronouns in this sentence 'we don't let *them* know *our* real names, when *we* have sex with *them* we don't let *them* touch *our* real bodies' echoes struggle. It is informative of the oppressive consumption of the vulnerable and the constant struggle to resist consumption. On another note, the name split in the text is socially and contextually connotative. For instance, the name, 'Iyese' connects to the tradition and culture of a particular ethnic group in Nigeria, the Urhobo. Iyese personifies the bearer, connecting her to her root. But 'Emilia' is Western and anonymous. Thus, it is situated outside Iyese's sense of self. Its anonymity corresponds to the social space where it is adopted – the city.

Iyese's change of name is synonymous with her escape to the city. Her movement between two names enables a fluid and symbolic crossing between the spaces of accountability and autonomy, respectively associated with the village and the city. As 'Iyese', she is charged with the responsibility of conforming to the demands of 'the spot where she is born' (*Arrows* 144), echoed in her grandmother's reminder that she is a child of her womb and that 'a wise child listens to the voice of her parents' (*Arrows* 144). But divorced from Dr. Maximus, Iyese impulsively 'head[s] ... towards Langa, a city ... she had heard was a vast, strange human bazaar where shame had no odour because people lived anonymously' (*Arrows* 157). In the city, she becomes a prostitute taking the name 'Emilia', thereby screening her sense of responsibility in order to survive the pressures of adverse institutional exclusion in the everyday city experience. The same pressure applies to Bukuru, whose life in the city is explained by his grandmother as a distancing from the language of his hearth (*Arrows* 89). His struggle to survive socio-political pressures in the city also informs his nominal and spatial escape to a nickname and the beach. Iyese and Bukuru typify physical border crossing from the village to the city that exposes one to stark economic and political inequality and an inescapable chain of class interaction. Their movement to the city launches them into a space and a system violently controlled and transgressed by the political elites.

### Interclass Interaction and Transgressed Spaces

*Arrows of Rain* is replete with transgressed spaces. By space, I take into cognisance the territorial and the conceptual spaces. Conceptually, I pay particular attention to the spaces forcefully crossed in the military/prostitute and military/civilian relationship. Unlike any other novel, *Arrows of Rain* captures the corrupt and dictatorial political era of 1979-1998 and represents in detail how the bodies of the prostitutes become the space where political stress is robbed off and deposited,

compounded by the anonymity of the city space. The text presents rape as a violent performance of difference and a weapon for border management on both physical and symbolic levels of victimhood. The prostitutes are victims of physical rape and sexual abuse on one hand. They are also victims of symbolic rape manifest in the social condition that compels them to change their names and mute their voices. At both levels, rape achieves an exclusionary purpose, alienating the victim both from society and the self. Iyese's rape and murder by Bello (a major in the military who later becomes Madia's military head of state) is typical of the social space that Ndibe constructs. According to Iyese, Bello not only raped her on the first day of her encounter with him, but he also violently rapes her any time she tries to break away from him. Many times, he tells her that he likes it when a woman cries (*Arrows* 160).

Iyese's protests and efforts to free herself from Bello's slavery and control, having fallen in love with Bukuru, are directly proportionate to Bello's threat to kill her. Undeterred by Bello's threat, she continues her relationship with Bukuru and gives him narration of her inescapable relationship with Bello. However, her resolution to extricate herself from the parasitic interclass relationship with Bello increases Bello's determination to abuse her space. Invariably, he becomes an obstacle to Iyese's 'struggle for a dignified existence in circumstances so dire and inhuman' (*Arrows* 165). He threatens Iyese:

I will kill you without consequence! I will show you that you're nothing but a common filthy prostitute! Because I brought myself low to sleep with you, you open your dirty trap and tell me you're not interested. I will show you who is who in this city! (*Arrows* 159)

Bello symbolises the state and the elites who control the politics of economic and political classification. His threat typifies what Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams identify as 'violent performativity of bordering practices designed to exclude, abandon, and/or kill the "Other"' (731). Bello's relationship with Iyese displays a clear sense of class dichotomy. The imbalance in their relationship is reinforced by occupational and gender differences. As a major in the army and privileged by his masculinity, Bello sees Iyese (a female sex worker) as lacking social value, and her death of no consequence. To avenge his supposed double hurt – his descent from the upper class to relate with her, and the supposed assault on this descent – he makes her pay with her body. Bello sees an assault on Iyese's body and life as commensurate with the insult he claims to have received from her. Bello, therefore, rapes Iyese brutally, this time not because he loves it when women cry, but according to him to 'close her dirty trap [her voice]' for demanding her freedom (*Arrows* 159). This resonates with Newman's reclaim that 'the criteria determining where and how the border is to be constructed in society and/or space are drawn up by the societal managers, usually acting in their own political, economic or institutional interests' ('Borders and Bordering' 175). Thus, for Bello, raping Iyese is a re-inscription of the class difference. His violent transgression of Iyese's body, like the politicians' oppression, is a mechanism for the closure both of the voice and the border. Lying in a pool of her own blood, Iyese narrates her rape to Bukuru:

'He [Bello] came with three men. They had daggers.'



‘The men pinned me to the bed. Then Isa [Bello] stabbed my vagina with a dagger. I started bleeding. That’s when he entered me with his penis.’

‘It was like the stab of the knife, but more painful.’

‘They pushed me down on the bed and forced apart my legs. Isa brought out his dagger and said he wanted to teach my vagina a lesson.’ (*Arrows* 166–67)

Bello sees Iyese as a mere sexual object whose existence is tied to its function; thus, he associates her totality with a part of her – her vagina. And because Bello sees only the functional significance of Iyese, he believes that teaching her vagina a lesson suffices for teaching her a lesson. Through this synecdoche, the novel exposes the objectification of the lower class whose existential identity is tied to their function as labourers. The elites’ interaction with the poor masses is predicated exclusively on the labour the latter produces. The act of objectifying the oppressed echoes Freire’s claim that the oppressor’s control of the class border is driven by his/her tendency to ‘in-animate’ everything and everyone he/she encounters (59). On the other hand, the graphic image of three men pinning a woman down in order to enact a penetration of the phallic image (the dagger and the penis) emphasizes the violence of masculinity against feminine vulnerability.

A critical analysis of the details of border crossing in relation to Iyese’s rape exposes invasion at multiple levels and planes. Topographically, her space of habitation is invaded and it is on the basis of this topographical transgression that the symbolic forms of crossing take effect. Breaking into her room is simultaneously breaking into her space as a woman and into her body in the form of penetration with a dagger and penis. She receives in her body the pains of class difference. Broadly speaking, she serves as a visual metaphoric image that embodies the violence of social constraints and inequality. Iyese’s body gains an allegorical significance as it represents the rape of the nation by the corrupt and dictatorial Nigerian government of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ndibe uses the tropes of prostitution and prostitution to expose the violence of the political elite and show them as real outcasts in their inhumanity to civilians. The body of the prostitute becomes the body of the nation receiving the operation of a military dictatorship. On the other side, these bodies represent the resistance to adverse socio-spatial pressure.

## Border Resistance and Reclaiming Agency

Though resistance to political dominance results in increased suppression, the marginalised nonetheless are always putting up bottom-up pressure to state border control. Newman identifies the study of the “bottom up’ process of change, emanating from the daily practices of ordinary people [such as Bukuru] living in the borderland region’ as crucial in the study of borders as dynamic institutions (‘On Borders and Power’ 15). Our first encounter with Bukuru in the text presents him as a typical bottom-up challenge from the borderland region. Bukuru’s debased life at the beach is what John House calls ‘double peripherality’ (qtd in Newman, ‘Borders and Bordering’ 179). By double peripherality, House implies the situation of living at the physical border as an economically, socially, and politically marginalized person. Bukuru’s flight to the beach and his disguise as a madman for fear of Bello’s brutality disassociates him from every privilege. By his flight to the beach, he psychologically crosses from sanity to insanity; numbing his past until it

is ironically resurrected by the similar incidence of rape which had driven him to the beach.

Bukuru's resolve to reclaim his voice after two decades of silence informs his re-crossing the border and challenging military dictatorship even at the risk of imprisonment and death. Giving himself over to the detectives in unrelenting attestation to the incessant military rape and murder of prostitutes at the beach is a performance of his determination to challenge the state. It is his way of challenging violent social structures that sustain objectification and inequality. Conversely, Bukuru's arrest and his forceful re-crossing from the margins of the city (the beach) to the court is the author's way of satirizing his choice of silence and flight. By bringing Bukuru through a full cycle to repair his silence, Ndibe insists on active participation in social change. His recall of Bukuru from the margin (the beach) to the centre (the city) is a reinstatement of the individual and a challenge to the narrative of anonymity hitherto accorded the city space. Bukuru's life at the beach, his arrest and crossing from the beach, the court session, and his sentence to prison, bear a symbolic relationship to resistance.

There is a resonance between the spaces of the beach and the prison cell. Both engage in intricate relationships with the city. On one hand, both spaces share a similar sense of peripherality that is respectively physical and symbolic. On another hand, while the beach informs intentional escape from the city, a restorative space (nevertheless problematized by Bukuru's escape), the prison exemplifies a forced escape that also ironically becomes restorative for Bukuru. Restoratively, like the beach, Bukuru's cell enables an encounter with his untold story after two decades of silence. The prison space becomes a continuation of his resolution to reclaim his agency and tell his story which is intricately connected with the story of his nation. The prison harbours the restitution he has to make for not publishing [telling] Iyese's story when he had the opportunity to do so, and when telling it would have realised a possible change in the course of Madian history.

The power of Bukuru's prison resonates with Daniel Roux's claim that the prison is 'a curious pastiche of the new and the old, a kind of laboratory where history cooks up its experiments, where we discover the deformation of the old still entangled with the inchoate emergence of the new' ('Inside/Outside' 248). Roux's claim particularly speaks to Bukuru's coming to terms with his past life; his neglect as a journalist and his present need to respond to the story he has carried in him for 20 years. In the prison, he not only discovers how deformed his past has been, but he also accepts the need to free the past in the present – the entanglement of the past and the new. So, the privacy of his cell empowers his desire to engage the power that suppresses his voice. He responds to the demand for a narrative, which is 'one of the characteristics of a prison' (Roux, 'Inside/Outside' 255; Roux, 'I Speak to You' 23). He, therefore, seeks the journalist's (Femi's) help in the publication of his story.

By the act of telling his story (which invariably is Iyese's story) in the form of a letter addressed to Femi, Bukuru enacts multiple forms of border crossing, since '[e]very border-crossing is furthermore a crossing of borders on several different scales, planes or scapes' (Schimanski 65). Bukuru's story crosses his corporeal border to become a written story eliciting multiple voices: 'You must wonder why I wanted to see you. It's simple. I wanted to ask you to be the voice for my story'

(*Arrows* 48). Also, the topographic crossing of this story from the borders of the prison cell to the public becomes a necessary bottom-up arrow that must be thrown from the borderland region to expose the destructive powers of the elites and possibly affect social border bridging. One must also take note of the important beginning and ending of a narration that spans 24 years with similar incidences of military rape. This, for me, is Ndibe's way of equating the Nigerian military regime of 1966 to 1993 (though intercepted by a 4-year corrupt democratic regime) to the rape of the nation. Yet, despite the mortal harm inflicted by military and political oppressions, such as Iyese's and Bukuru's death, Ndibe emphasises the need for a continued bottom-up challenge on coercive social boundaries.

Bukuru's suicide in his cell, for instance, does not imply a closure to struggle. Instead (and by juxtaposition), his death places greater emphasis on the strength of the story that he hands over to Femi. His death foregrounds the power of story which, as Yvonne Vera holds, is 'the space between life and death' (cited in Samuelson 248). Vera believes that this space is never silent. Thus, by maintaining an unbroken Iyese-Bukuru-Femi storyline, Ndibe underpins the power of the word that transcends class fixity. He engages in what Meg Samuelson, referring to Yvonne Vera, describes as 'the restorative gesture of a persistent re-storying' (248). Ndibe demonstrates that however closed and rigid the boundaries of power may be, everyone (especially the marginalised) has something to contribute to social change and human flourishing. As once a journalist and a literary activist, Ndibe believes that when words cross the corporeal or spatial border with the public, they attain the social significance necessary for effecting change. He considers persuasive telling (voicing) a part of bordering process that has 'the effect ... of constituting, sustaining, or modifying borders' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 729). Through the narrator, Ndibe seems to declare his own stand as an individual and an activist: 'against the power of the state, I can only throw this story. I know: it is a feeble weapon. But it is the only weapon I have. A time shall come when those who today sit on the heads of others will themselves be called to account' (*Arrows* 54).

## Conclusion

*Arrows of Rain* reveals a critical engagement with Nigerian political history replete with multiple transgressive borders – social, corporeal, temporal, topographical, symbolic, and epistemological. It narrates the production and reproduction of socio-political divides and the interweaving of past and present traumatic moments of violence. By juxtaposing the vulnerability of the masses with the affluence and brutality of the elites, the text focuses attention on socio-economic and political categorisation. It interrogates the performance of categorization in relation to inhabited spaces and the bodies that inhabit these spaces. Through the contact of bodies and memories and the everyday human interaction forming a tangible part of the city network, the novel exposes a hegemonic structure that requires a de-bordering. The beach, the prison cell, and Iyese's room are private spaces that incubate stories of power dynamics that must be given a voice. They are spaces whose narratives have to be let out into the public for individual and societal liberation. The violence against the weak at the beach, in the chalets, in the rooms, and the prisons is a form of oppression to be challenged by exposing violence through telling and journalistic reporting. Ndibe encourages the agency of the voice

as a form of revolutionary action capable of weakening the effect of violence. Ndibe believes that salvaging the nation lies mostly in the resolution of individuals to give up the folly of silence, and to attack social injustice with the spoken or the written word. By condemning silence and passivity in the socio-economic struggle he calls all to the activism of challenging dehumanising social codification.

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