



**Utrecht  
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## **Between Three Worlds**

Time, Space, and Otherness as Interstices of Resistance in Helen  
Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and Diana Evans' *26a* (2005)

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1934821

MA Literature Today

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Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Word Count: 19249

*With special thanks to Elisabeth, Selma,  
and of course you, Mum.*

## ABSTRACT

This study looks at two novels, Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and Diana Evans *26a* (2005), as examples of Black womxn's postcolonial gothic fiction. It aims to ascertain how these works, as examples of the increasingly popular African gothic genre, demonstrate resistance against the intersectional oppressions that constitute Black womxn's identity. These novels similarly engage with Nigerian cosmologies surrounding twins, souls, *abiku/ogbanje* spirits, and different manifestations of Black womxn's power, in the negotiation of identity as British-Nigerian subjects; and both follow the lives of female, 'half and half' children, who are caught between Africa and the UK. By reclaiming control over cultural production and merging traditional African cosmologies with the Western gothic tradition, these authors acknowledge the rich cultural history and narrative traditions of Nigeria and invite readers to consider alternate social realities than those perpetuated by Western thought. Ultimately, they undermine the centrality of such oppressive Western constructs, and enact resistance against their intersectional oppressions. Close-reading analysis of the texts exposes the presence of multiple *forms of resistance* in the rewriting of time, space, and Otherness, rather than merely the *elucidation of fears*, as in the traditional gothic manner. Effectively, the novels challenge colonialist conceptions of power and privilege which position the African womxn as the ultimate Other and, thus, they constitute acts of cultural resistance.

*Keywords: time, space, Otherness, postcolonialism, resistance, intersectionality, feminism, gothic, African gothic, orality, belief systems, power, privilege, culture, interstices, cultural anxieties, fear, womxn, abiku, ogbanje, ibeji*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In the years following Nigerian Independence and with the dissolution of colonialism across the African continent, Black womxn's<sup>1</sup> writing has seen huge increases in output and popularity, across a broad range of genres. Often referencing the work of earlier African writers (from the 1960's-1990's), Black womxn writers have begun reconfiguring national realities which have historically positioned them as Other on several intersecting axes of oppression (Bryce 49). One genre in particular that has established itself is what may be, or has been, referred to as African gothic, or postcolonial gothic fiction. Novels such as Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl (TIG)* and Diana Evans' *26a*, both published in 2005, engage with traditional gothic themes such as Otherness, archaic areas, and a fluid approach to space and time (Khair 5), which they arguably reappropriate to reflect their reality. Thereby, recentring the Western literary tradition of the gothic in Africa and, concurrently, the colonial/racial Other.

Effectively, these texts and their authors are exposing anxieties and creating interstices for resistance through their writing in line with the "postcolonial *project* of 'writing back', 'filling the gaps', 'breaking the silence', 'telling the other side of the story' or 'opposing colonial discourses of difference'" (Khair 18, their emphasis). This thesis will investigate how such interstices for resistance are dynamically mobilised and imaginatively shaped through the writing of time, space, and Otherness in the postcolonial gothic novels mentioned. It will explore the historical traditions of gothic fiction and how it can be used to 're-write' different fears. The focus will be on how Black womxn reappropriate certain gothic

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<sup>1</sup> This study employs the use of the term 'Womxn,' which first appeared in the public discourse surrounding second-wave feminism in the 1970's, to express more emancipated womanhood through the rejection of the word 'man/men.' It is a term adopted here due to its intersectional bent and associations with Black feminism, as it exemplifies the ways in which difference marks the site of struggle. It must be acknowledged that there is some debate as to whether this term is more inclusive or divisive as some argue that marginalised groups should be included under the umbrella of 'women' and do not need an individual term. However, the word is used here to demonstrate the intersectionality and awareness of Black womxn writers, and in recognition that the history of feminism has included racism, transphobia and harmful gender binary views.

tropes and integrate traditional African belief systems to expose and show resistance against the “residual cultural anxieties” (Brooks et al. 246) that constitute their oppression. The relative newness of the genre, in combination with the resolve of this study to evaluate the interactions between African belief systems and gothic traditions, positions this research within the ongoing discourse surrounding Black womxn’s fiction.

Postcolonialism<sup>2</sup>, and postcolonial literature in general, is concerned with representations and narrations of the Other; largely, the deconstructing and challenging of colonialist conceptions of power and privilege that position the African subject as the ultimate Other. Thus, it contributes an important approach to the analysis of Black womxn’s fiction. It can be ascertained, using Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of ‘intersectionality’ (1989), that the Black womxn experience has been repeatedly erased through the treatment of race, gender, class, age, etc. as “mutually exclusive categories” rather than a multidimensional, interconnected system for identity analysis (Crenshaw in Cooper, Brittney 2). Hence, intersectionality engages with the implications of social positioning and by extension the different axes on which the formation of the Other rests. Recognising the discourse of “interlocking systems of power and oppression” (1) from both an intersectional and postcolonial perspective is thereby key to understanding the multi-layered dimensions from which Black womxn’s identity is constituted. Furthermore, it is only through this recognition that the work of resistance in literature emerges. In this study, the term ‘resistance’ will be used to refer to the complex process of “counter-hegemonic ideological production” (Gamsi in Harlow 14). Effectively, it constitutes the act of reclaiming control over cultural narratives from repressive (Western) authorities which insist on the “‘here-and-now’ of historical

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<sup>2</sup> Here, it is important to note that in the context of this thesis ‘post-colonialism’ (hyphenated) refers to the time after colonisation (Alavi 1972; Saul 1974), while the unhyphenated, ‘postcolonialism,’ is referent to the academic study and discourse of issues surrounding postcolonial cultures.

reality” (Harlow 12)<sup>3</sup>. I understand it less as a condition and more as a practice, as a dynamic moment at the intersection of time, space and Otherness where dominant, ‘modern,’ structures of reality are subverted. Therefore, in this study resistance may take many forms, from demonstrating awareness of Nigerian histories and cosmologies which long precede Western constructs, to the written act of haunting as the return of the ‘degraded present’ in which Black womxn are positioned as ‘less,’ and in many other forms. Effectually, Black womxn writers’ resistance comprises the opposition of dominant structures and critical engagement with “parallel oppressions – race, gender, class, and sexuality – that haunt Black women’s own identities” (Brooks et al. 240). As suggested in my subtitles, this thesis is concerned with the notion of resistance as interstices. Rather than making grand proclamations, I approach it as the creation of interstitial space in which multiple forms of oppression are exposed and undermined.

Markedly, Otherness is also a recurrent element within gothic fiction. Many postcolonial scholars have investigated the status of the Other and the writing of Otherness in the gothic genre (Gaylard, 2008; Khair, 2009; Brooks, 2018). This is, according to Tabish Khair in his text, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* (2009), “a common preoccupation” of the field (3). Such an assertion may seem injudicious, but as Jerrard E. Hogle explains, in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002), the gothic is a genre that grew from the elucidation of fears. These often include but are not limited to: fears of the mental unconscious, desires from the past now buried in that forgotten location, and “deep-seated social and historical dilemmas ... that become more fearsome the more characters and readers attempt to cover them up or reconcile them” (Hogle 3). These fears have traditionally been projected onto the figure of the Other in its multiplicity of different forms, such as: “Satan, demon, orphan, the outsider, vampire, ghost, non-Christian

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on Black womxn’s resistance in literature, see: Barbara Harlow (1987) and Zenzele Isoke (2013).

gods, sexually dangerous womxn, racially different characters etc.” (Khair 6). Therefore, in the historical context of African fiction and colonialism, the presence of the Other is undeniably significant. They constitute a site upon which cultural anxieties are reflected, therefore acting as markers of the time and space within which they were written. Thus, the current revival of the horror genre in postcolonial African fiction can be read as engaging, at least partly, with the significant residual fears associated with colonial histories.

Another powerful method for explicating residual fears, recognisable across Black womxn’s postcolonial fiction, is the integration of traditional cosmologies and epistemological systems. Investigating how these African cosmologies are adapted, re-written, and used in such works allows for new insights into postcolonial gothic fictions. Namely, how black womxn writers are inverting traditional Western gothic tropes to show resistance against oppression. This statement relies upon the significant differences between African and European/Western conceptions of time, space, and Otherness, as outlined in the theoretical and methodological sections of this thesis. By including traditional belief systems, these authors effectively reject linear and/or binary Eurocentric beliefs and the resultant forms of oppression they promote, creating openings for resistance. In the context of the chosen novels, this paper will focus on the Yoruba and Igbo belief systems of Nigeria as they are communicated in *TIG* and *26a*, respectively. Here, it must be stated that I am aware of my subject positioning as a white woman with a Western education and aim to proceed with care and respect for the cultures and topics addressed in this essay.

Helen Oyeyemi’s critically acclaimed debut novel, *The Icarus Girl* (2001) is an example of Black womxn’s writing that addresses the diasporic existence of the Nigerian woman, and the intersecting axis on which one is positioned as Other. The novel follows an 8-year-old female protagonist, Jessamy/Jess/Jessy/Waruola Harrison, as she negotiates identity, culture, and family. Jess’ mother is Nigerian, of Yoruba heritage, while her father is



a white, British man. Thus, Jess is situated as a “half-and-half child,” inhabiting an uncertain, even liminal existence, as Jane Bryce explicates (64). The narrative, written in the third person in keeping with African oral tradition, is located between Ibadan, Nigeria, and London, England. It takes on a gothic dimension when Jess encounters the child spectre Titiola/TillyTilly while in Nigeria. TillyTilly follows Jess to London, reveals that Jess had a twin who died at birth, and attempts to possess her body in a series of increasingly horrifying encounters. Oyeyemi writes TillyTilly as an ambiguous Other, a site upon which Western thoughts and fears are projected (through Jess’ engagement as a child raised in the UK), and Yoruba systems are embodied (through her spiritual knowledge and powers). Within the novel, TillyTilly consistently affects time and space, disrupting notions of ‘reality’ as only existing in the tangible present. In her presence there is no “single age” as time is conceptualised by the West (Mbembe 16). Meanwhile, space is most clearly differentiated through the ability of the two protagonists (Jess and TillyTilly) to walk in “three worlds,” namely, “this world...the spirit world...[and] the Bush” (Oyeyemi 174). This ability is key to the context of this study, as it relocates the site of the final conflict between the two girls to an external and surreal space in which Jess can negotiate with her oppression both literally and figuratively. Thus, *TIG* lends itself to the analysis of Black womxn’s gothic fiction through Oyeyemi’s inclusion of Yoruba cosmologies and the manipulation of Eurocentric notions surrounding time, space, and otherness; all of which contribute to the unveiling of cultural anxieties and resistance against oppression.

Similarly, Diana Evans’ *26a* follows sisters of mixed Nigerian-British heritage, thus, also ‘half-and-half’ children, from before their birth up to early adulthood. Bessi and Georgia are identical twins living in London. Their attic room oversees all that happens in the house, and even things that are not, as the two travel outside the limitations of space and time in their dreams. Often, they are far away – sometimes literally, mostly figuratively – from their

Igbo mother, Ida, who, overcome with homesickness, communicates with the ghosts of the family she left behind on another continent. As a family they travel from London to Nigeria where an incident derails one of the twins' lives forever. As the novel progresses, what seems to be a classic *Bildungsroman* assumes a gothic quality following the death of Georgia, and her return as a ghostly Other. Evans, like Oyeyemi, uses the trope of doubles, twins and/or *doppelgängers* to engage with the concept of Othering and interrogate the postcolonial existence. Within the novel, the twins also negotiate their culture and identity as sisters, and Nigerian-British women. *26a* accommodates the Igbo beliefs surrounding twins and the cosmological plain through use of embedded oral folktales that foretell the fate of the twins, integrating the trope of 'the Bush,' and exploring the family's spiritualistic abilities. Hence, *26a* offers an alternative approach to Black womxn's gothic literature while utilising many of the same tools for resistance as *TIG*.

Effectively, in both novels, the presence of Nigerian cosmologies and 'ghostly' twins structures the potential for change by establishing "a realm outside the material where selves may be remade" (Bryce 64). Both Oyeyemi and Evans build on the – typically masculine – West African literary tradition of 'the Bush' to engage with the realities of colonialism, within a metaphorical landscape (Mafe 22). Significantly, 'the Bush' can be read as a site upon which self-identification in the postcolony is interrogated; a place "that cannot be grasped...[where] the visible and invisible, time and space ... become interwoven" (Mbembe 203) – much like archaic spaces in the gothic tradition (Hogle 2002; Khair 2009). So, by writing 'the Bush,' Oyeyemi and Evans engage with, (re)claim, and effectively rewrite, an African literary tradition. In this way, they can be considered examples of how Black womxn writers are disrupting the oppressive narrative structures imposed upon them under the colonial state by integrating traditional beliefs with modern narratives.

One “disruptive [act]” (Brooks et al. 246) that destabilises the marginalised status of the African womxn can be recognised in the use of oral traditions within both novels. In the West African oral tradition, womxn were central to the dissemination of knowledge in poetry, stories, songs, and more. Their status allowed them control over the narratives, and in many cultures, they were considered “composers who, sometimes, transformed and re-created an existing body of oral traditions in order to incorporate woman-centered perspectives” (Nnameka 138). However, with the European invasion came the decline in oral traditions; the transition was made towards the written word through the collusion of imperialism and patriarchy, and womxn and their voices became marginalised. Through this marginalisation, Nnameka states that the African womxn assumed a state of liminality – “fluidity, flux and ‘constant transition’” – rendering them neither here nor there (142). Occupying a status as both liminal and marginalised positions Black womxn writers uniquely for writing postcolonial gothic fiction, as the gothic itself constitutes a liminal space. The ambiguity and flexibility of the genre allows writers to negotiate “between the past and the future, the old and the new” (Khair 4). Effectively, both Black womxn’s writing and gothic fiction inhabit a fluid space, which allows for the subversion of tropes and the interrogation of fears: personal, social, or cultural. Hence, the intention of this study to engage with Black womxn’s gothic fiction as a chosen method of inscription, and thereby resistance, which facilitates the re-inscription of womxn’s relevance as subjects in control of their own narrative (Nnameka 138).

Consequently, the question raised when reading these novels, and which this thesis will aim to answer, is: *how do these two Black womxn writers use traditional belief systems in combination with the gothic genre, to subvert oppressive structures and negotiate positions of resistance, in connection with time, space, and Otherness?* To answer this question, this paper will start by constructing a framework that outlines the theoretical concepts relevant to

this analysis. Drawing on the works of Achille Mbembe (2001), Tabish Khair (2009), Kinitra D. Brooks (2018), Rolando Vázquez (2020), and more, it will explain how common understandings of time and space are constructed in Western thought and commonly presented within the gothic genre. Furthermore, it aims to highlight how the presentation of these Western constructs as objective was central to the repression and consequent loss of cultures and traditions, with the goal of garnering power and creating the Other. Thus, this section will also provide explanations of ‘the Other’ in both Gothicism and postcolonialism, before identifying this study’s working definition of the Other for the analysis of Black womxn’s postcolonial gothic fiction.

Then, chapter three will outline the relevant historical context for this study and provide an overview of the methodological tools it will utilise. Both Oyeyemi and Evans have constructed narratives with protagonists of mixed heritage, and both authors are of Nigerian descent but live and work in the UK. The third chapter will therefore establish how Gothicism is a historically relevant and proven tool for addressing cultural anxieties, before outlining the various forms of oppression womxn may face in both Nigeria and the UK. Next, it will explore the development of the African gothic in Nigeria and attempt to ascertain why and how it is becoming such a popular genre for Black womxn writers. In crafting this contextual outline for the study, I hope to establish that the interactions between African cosmologies and classic Western Gothicism allow these texts to be read as *forms of resistance*, rather than the traditional gothic effect, an *elucidation of fears*.

The fourth chapter will explore some examples and tools of resistance that can be recognised within both novels. Analysis of form and structure will be conducted to ascertain the liminal nature of both novels and the disruptive effects of such choices on dominant structures of reality. Concurrently, key characters and gothic tropes that recurrently affect constructs of Western reality (through their impact on time, space, and Otherness) will be

outlined in order to distinguish how the integration of Nigerian belief systems subverts their effects; thereby, establishing spaces for Black womxn's resistance and recentring them within these spaces. Furthermore, this chapter intends to determine how the authors undermine and interrogate the West's linear and/or binary belief systems, through the writing of alternative cosmologies presented as reality. As Western constructs of modernity and, therefore, denotations of 'progress,' the manipulation of time, space, and Otherness in Black womxn's literature is powerful in the recentring of African belief systems and the rejection of linear, dichotomous oppositions which imply a hierarchy of power. Thus, in rewriting such themes, Black womxn writers can be recognised as undermining the centrality of such oppressive Western constructs and demonstrating resistance against their intersectional oppressions. Methodologically, these arguments will employ comparative close-reading of the texts in a variety of structured sub-sections, cross-referencing of African belief systems and gothic traditions, in order to determine what types of resistance are being enacted and the effectiveness of this 'rewriting.'

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand how the manipulation of time, space, and Otherness in Nigerian literature effectively creates room for Black womxn resistance, it is first necessary to outline what these concepts are, in the context of this thesis. Each topic section will outline the pertinent theoretical concepts of their respective subject area, establishing their position in the gothic tradition and focusing on the remediation of such concepts in Black womxn's postcolonial writing, as needed. Finally, they will establish the relevance of the topics to this study, and how they will be applied to the analysis of the novels.

### 2.1 TIME

Time is, at first, a seemingly stable concept. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “a finite extent or stretch of continued existence, as the interval separating two successive events or actions, or the period during which an action, condition, or state continues.” From a Western perspective, it can be regarded as following a relatively simple linear structure: past into present, present into future. However, this perspective enforces the Eurocentric claim that the present is the only site of the real, the past is archaic, and the future is the site of progress. Many scholars (Fanon; 1968, Vázquez; 2020) have discussed the effects of politicised time on historically oppressed societies. For example, Rolando Vázquez's article, “Modernity Coloniality Visibility: The Politics of Time” (2020), establishes that ‘modern’ time has been politicised to the point that the oppressed are severed from their past, cultural memory, and traditional beliefs (18). Effectively, ‘modern’ time has become a tool for domination – one that creates the Other by “rendering it invisible, relegating ... [it] to oblivion” (18). Thus, we can see how the framing of time can be, and has been, used as a powerful tool in the oppression of cultures. Therefore, when reclaimed by said cultures, rewriting time demonstrates resistance against oppressive, Eurocentric structures.

Concurrently, Achille Mbembe – whose philosophical, theoretical study on the entanglement of subjectivity and time in African social formations, *On the Postcolony* (2001), is central to this study – explores the positioning of Africa and the African subject as an “absolute other” (Mbembe 2). Fundamentally, his text argues against predominant social theories stemming from the West, which position themselves as accurate portrayals of modernity and progress, and through which sub-Saharan Africa emerges as the “very figure of ‘the strange’” (3). Time and its conceptualisations, he argues, is an example of such a social theory. Western attitudes fail to integrate notions of *time as lived*, in all its complexities, multiplicities, and paradoxes. Rather, historians rely on reductive perspectives that recognise only permanence in contrast to change (6). His notion of paradoxical time posits that, unlike in Western cultures that structure their reality around ‘the present,’ “African social formations are not necessarily converging toward a single point, trend, or cycle. They harbor the possibility of a variety of trajectories neither convergent nor divergent but interlocked” (16). Ultimately, we can ascertain that a single age does not exist within African society. There is no ‘present,’ since there is neither a linear progression through time, nor a straightforward sequence in which moments cancel out, annul, and replace the ones preceding (16). Thus, this thesis concurs with Mbembe that the “time of African existence” is not an order, but rather an interlocking of pasts, present, and futures that are connected to earlier periods of time, and in which each age carries over, modifies, and thereby preserves the ones before (16).

Mbembe’s notion is particularly relevant in the study of Black womxn’s postcolonial fictions, since acknowledging paradoxical time creates space for composite traumas to be written (Brooks et al. 238). Thus, the integration of traditional African belief systems has allowed Black womxn writers to move their horror away from enslavement and colonialism and towards “more creative and artistic construction” (238). Doing so arguably complexifies

the Black womxn's experience and is, therefore, key to demonstrating resistance. Essentially, as Kinitra D. Brooks, Alexis McGee, and Stephanie Schoellman explain in their article, "Speculative Sankofarration: Haunting Black Women in Contemporary Horror Fiction," Black womxn writers "eschew linearity and one-dimensionality" due to the intersectional nature of their oppression (241). Acknowledging the importance of time and its significance in African cultures is therefore hugely applicable to the analysis and interpretation of African texts and can drastically change the way we read Black womxn's horror.

Overall, "Speculative Sankofarration" is an article which endeavours to expose the lack of critical engagement with Black womxn's horror writing. It argues that the prevalence of ancestral spirits, simultaneous multiplicities, and occult practices across "African diasporic lore" (Brooks et al. 237) indicate 'gothic literature' status. The centrality of African beliefs here is prevalent not only in the analysis of Black womxn's horror but in the etymology of the word 'sankofarration' itself; 'Sankofa' derives from the traditional Akan language in West African – literally meaning 'it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot' (247). By engaging with 'sankofarration' in the speculative realm of Black womxn's horror, Brooks et al. have effectively crafted a framework for analysing "literary haunting as interstices of resistance" (Brooks et al. 238). They establish that the presence of ghosts, spectres, and other symbols of haunting – *ghostly embodiment* – indicates that something has been lost. Essentially, symbols of oppressions and/or repressions, abusive systems of power, and other forgotten or lost facets of identity are manifest in these conceptions, and the impact on daily life is explored in their rendering (239). As a result, these literary hauntings can be read as disruptions of linear time, creating a place for concurrent time existence (240). Thus, ghosts act as agents of cultural regeneration and remembrance, and their use in Black womxn's fiction demonstrates their resistance against oppression.



Contemporaneously, Gerard Gaylard's article, "The Postcolonial Gothic: Time and Death in Southern African Literature," outlines the historical connection between *ghostly embodiment* and time, linking it to the discourse of thanatophilia in traditional gothic literature. Thanatophilia, or "the irrational urge to cripple and/or extinguish life," manifests in the genre as "the return of the repressed, the manifestation of repressed anxieties" (Gaylard 3). Fundamentally, it relativises the present, which is haunted by mortality; the past is always existing in the present, and there is no such thing as an anachronism (4). In gothic fiction, thanatophilia can be recognised in the authors' chosen form of the Other, so often denoting "the characteristic return of the repressed in the guise of the living dead, the dead in life, phantoms, ghosts, spiritualism, vampires and other undead; in other words, with time and cyclicity" (4). Essentially, the notion of thanatophilia adds to and is in discourse with Brooks et al.'s notion of speculative sankofarration, as both outline the importance of undead Others for interrogating the oppressive constructs of time and exposing repressed anxieties. Thereby, one can recognise an established history within Gothicism of implicitly addressing the redundancies and impacts of a linear understanding of time, fundamentally through the writing of death or death-like situations. This allows for new methods of analysis and the exposure of intersectional oppressions by relativising mortality as the transience of power (6).

This thesis will thereby investigate the effects of paradoxical time in the African tradition in conflict with the 'modern' time as conceptualised by the global West, to ascertain how conceptions of time impact the Black womxn experience. By applying these concepts to the analysis of the novels *TIG* and *26a*, this study aims to establish that the manipulation and discourse of time in Black womxn's gothic fiction is a powerful tool for exploring cultural anxieties. It will argue that the boycott of one-dimensionality in its many forms is most obvious in the writing of literary hauntings, which complexify Black womxn's experiences and composite oppressions, and disrupt notions of time as finite or linear.

## 2.2 SPACE

Alongside, and inextricable from paradoxical time, is the negotiation of space in Black womxn's gothic literature. Like time, conceptions of space have historically contributed to the oppression and rejection of autochthonous cultures in Western thought, which objectively designates the present as the site of the real. In objectively communicating the Western understanding of time and space as markers of 'modernity,' space (and its rendering) becomes a site for the negotiation of power. Vázquez outlines how "domination is exercised through appropriating and defining [something's] 'proper place'" (20); thus, creating a "false dichotomy between the objectivity of structures and the subjectivity of representations" (Mbembe 6). Essentially, while autochthonous cultures approach space as a series of images, within which they retain the ability to denote "multiple and simultaneous functions of life" (146), the Western, linear, dichotomous discourse recognises only that which is tangible and present. Like with time, the conditions of reality are linked to spatial stability in Western thought, and thus the prominence of an 'imaginary' world in indigenous realities has contributed to their continued oppression. These communities are consistently positioned as an area of "'absence,' 'lack,' and 'non-being,'" (4) through their rejection of Western social constructs and beliefs in overlapping, concurrent realities – or *simultaneous multiplicities*. As a result, the reclamation of indigenous approaches to space and reality demonstrates a rejection of Western constructs that present themselves as facts. In a postcolonial rendering, this allows for the creation of new spaces for the negotiation of identity, in which multiple forms of oppression can be addressed synchronously.

Conceptually, *simultaneous multiplicities* are an African indigenous notion rooted in oral traditions. As a concept it implies the existence of many realities occurring at once, in spaces uninhibited by constructed time. In a society where the social and epistemological fields are entangled and orality traditionally sustained communication and the dissemination

of knowledge, “it might be said ... a magical attitude toward words [developed]” (Mbembe 144). Mbembe explains how the reliance on speech in traditional African cultures created a semiotic culture markedly different from the West. Essentially, in oral cultures, “to publicly articulate knowledge consisted, to a large extent, in making everything speak ... in constantly transforming reality into a sign and ... filling with reality things empty and hollow in appearance” (144). To simplify, reality was a construct continually in flux, dependant on the message that needed to be communicated. These malleable, articulated signs, Mbembe explicates, caused an epistemological, and therefore social, break between not “what was seen and what was read, but ... what was seen (*the visible*) and what was not seen (*the occult*)” (144, their emphasis). Consequently, the concept of *simultaneous multiplicities* captures a world that is both stable, and continually adapting through the interchange and exchange of “the visible and invisible, physical and spiritual, public and occult” within a single multiplicity (Gerber and Tembo 6).

When considering the implications of such an autochthonous principle on African gothic fictions, and particularly conceptions of space, it must be ascertained that this notion of *simultaneous multiplicities* imbued the people with “the power to represent reality” (Mbembe 145). Thus, it “[provides] a basis for ... [and states] the inseparability of, the being and the nonbeing of persons and things” (145). Effectively, in continually destabilising notions of reality, oral societies adopted a transient approach to space and thereby ‘existence.’ Consequently, the distinctions between “being and appearance, the world of the living and the world of spirits,” (145) were erased and, as a result, validated. Thus, African oral cultures conjured “a world of shade,” in which every sign represented multiple realities, to the point that the real world was unrepresentable, without some relation to the invisible world; “the image could not but be the visible and constructed form of something that had always to conceal itself” (145, 146). Fundamentally, the principle of *simultaneous*

*multiplicities* manifests in the ability to relativise and physicalise ‘that which is hidden’ to present some factor of reality. Thus, when applying theories of space to the novels *TIG* and *26a* – along with theories of time – we can see how the adaptation of autochthonous beliefs allows for the interrogation of underlying social anxieties, and the exposure of some axes on which Black womxn are oppressed.

Meanwhile, Mbembe expounds on the notion of *simultaneous multiplicities* by explaining how, in African oral cultures, “[this] world of shade and spirits was also the world of night—reflections in water, mirrors and dreams, masks, apparitions, phantoms, and ghosts of the dead (146); thus, reminiscent of traditional gothic spaces. Historically, notable space(s) in gothic literature serve as a physical area from which the gothic Other arises. Usually an “antiquated or seemingly antiquated space,” these spaces often conceal something that exacts psychological, physical, or some other form of ‘haunting’ upon the characters (Hogle 2). Further, Hogle explains that the ability to abject fears and anomalies from our modern conditions onto haunting Others and antiquated spaces is a large factor in the longevity and popularity of the genre (6). Moreover, the symbolic mechanisms written into gothic spaces allow for the negotiation of cultural anxieties using “a recurring method for shaping and obscuring our fears and forbidden desires” (6). Hence, space in traditional gothic fiction often takes the form of an area that marks the past (from a Western perspective), evocative of the de-linearising effect on space accommodated by *simultaneous multiplicities*.

To conclude, this thesis will approach space and its various renderings within the novels as simultaneous realities, in which multiple and intersecting forms of oppression can be addressed and exposed concurrently. It will engage with different spatial sites (both tangible, invisible, and ‘imaginary’) as they are written in *TIG* and *26a* and analyse their potential significance, while exploring the intersecting oppressions they represent. When taken in accordance with the manipulation of time, this study aims to show that Black

womxn's postcolonial gothic fiction is so impactful because it melds traditional, Western gothic tropes with African belief systems. Effectively, in merging the two, the objective reality of Western societies – which claim stability as the site of the real yet cannot avoid engaging with Otherness and alterity in art – are questioned. These Black womxn writers effectively undermine the projected objectivity of such social constructs, which present themselves as fact, as a means of wielding power. Thereby, they establish that an objective, linear approach to space as a marker of reality is not adequate for relaying cultural anxieties and exploring resistance. Rather, one must acknowledge the wealth and variety of social realities and their historical relevance to truly engage with different cultures hopes and fears.

### 2.3 OTHERNESS

Next, when considering the writing of postcolonial gothic fiction, conceptions of the Other arguably hold the most power for undermining oppressive constructs. Many scholars have tracked the increasing production and popularity of the genre across the African diaspora in recent years, theorising that these developments have occurred due to its malleability (Khair; Duncan; Brooks et al.). Khair links the history of the gothic with postcolonial literature that acts within, or is influenced by, the gothic genre, through the negotiation of identity and writing of Otherness (3). From the outset, he confirms that “Otherness is [and historically has been] a central concern of gothic literature in general,” and engages with the idea that fear in the gothic is more indicative of current social and cultural anxieties than the substance of the fear itself (4). In this case, the revival of gothic fiction, and the remediation of the genre outside of Europe (as it moves away from a white, middle-class author-/reader-ship), can be connected to the contemporary resurgence in colonial notions of Otherness (Kundnani qtd. in Khair 3), and the proliferation of authors railing against such labels.

Khair explains the common understanding of the Other and situates it as a vestige of the colonial era, namely: “the Other seen as a “Self waiting to be assimilated (and hence effectively internal or secondary to the Self), or the Other is cast as the purely negative image of the European Self, the obverse of the Self” (Khair 4). Then, he establishes that this dichotomous definition maintains the power imbalance between the European Self and the colonial Other by rendering it “utterly knowable in its very negativised unknowability” (4) and thus, oversimplifying complex identities and cultures. Consequently, he posits that the Other is better defined as ‘that which puts the Self into question’ (13): “an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (Bhabha qtd. in Khair 14). In the context of postcolonial gothic fiction, this definition is far more apt, as it allows for the exploration of multiple, intersecting axes on which identity is formed through the presentation of Otherness. Essentially, it can be determined that gothic Others are written “defamiliarized manifestations” of our fundamental inconsistencies, which we as readers subsequently “fear and desire because they both threaten to reengulf us and hold the promise of taking us back to our primal origins” (Hogle 7). Thus, when discussing the Others of Black womxn’s texts, such as *TIG* and *26a*, it must be considered that they are projections of the protagonists’ own – often sub-conscious – identity conflicts, often resulting from multiple and overlapping oppressions. Such a conclusion is warranted by the authors’ chosen form of the Other – in the gothic sense, as ghosts, and more broadly, in the writing of twins/*doppelgängers*.

Moreover, ghosts and spectres, as outlined by both Gaylard and Brooks et al., mark the return of something previously lost, and the relativisation of time within said return. Simultaneously, the incorporeal nature of spirits and ghosts imbues them with the ability to possess ‘real’ people, therefore examining the stability of spatial reality. Effectively, the writing of ghostly Others in gothic fiction is about distorting different levels of discourse,

such as those surrounding time and space, while exposing the interpenetration of other, seemingly binary conditions – “including life/death, natural/supernatural, ancient/modern, realistic/ artificial, and unconscious/conscious” (Hogle 9). In this manner, as Hogle explicates, ghosts and other gothic Others destabilise notions of reality and linearity and thus force us to question our own fears and their manifestations (9).

However, in the context of this study, the denotation of twinship and *doppelgängers* is of equal importance to the writing of ghostly Others. From one perspective, twins have a long history within Nigerian myth, which has resulted in their powerful status in Nigerian societies. Simultaneously, as postcolonial gothic fiction about ‘half and half’ children, the presence of doubles marks the often conflicting, multiple identities that the protagonists must navigate – as concurrently British and Nigerian, white and black, one and two; thus, marking the texts as postcolonial. As Jane Bryce explains in her article “‘Half and Half Children’: Third-Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel” (2008), *doppelgängers* in Black womxn’s fiction often take form in “the intimate other half of a protagonist in quest of her own identity and self-hood” (59). Their construction “embodies the use of the feminine double both as shadow or negative to the paradigmatic male protagonist of Nigerian fiction, and also as double of the self” (59). Therefore, their presence in such novels demonstrates resistance against the patriarchal structures that have so often limited Black womxn. The *doppelgänger*, in other words, haunts the text of contemporary social reality by mirroring the protagonist, elucidating and acting upon their unspoken fears, thus, exposing our, as readers, darkest fears and desires (59).

Hence, it can be delineated that the writing of Otherness is a compelling literary tool for representing and giving voice to our deepest fears and anxieties. While postcolonial studies are typically engaged with representations of the Other from a Western perspective through the analysis of colonialist texts (e.g. *Heart of Darkness*; 1899), contemporary African

fiction works to complexify these representations, thus, reacknowledging the depth of social and cultural knowledge in historically Othered communities. Thereby, the construction of the Other in Black womxn's postcolonial gothic fiction rests at the intersect of multiple axes of oppression, which often results in the formation of *uncanny* gothic Others; explained by Freud as, "the deeply and internally familiar (the most infantile of our desires or fears) as [they reappear] to us in seemingly external, repellent, and unfamiliar forms" (Hogle 6). Accordingly, this study aims to determine how these representations of Others work synchronously as an *elucidation of fears*, in the gothic tradition and as a rally against the socially, historically, and culturally flattening Othering of the colonial era, and thus a *form of resistance*. Specifically, this study aims to outline the desires, fears, and oppressions communicated to the reader through the writing of gothic Otherness in *TIG* and *26a*.



### 3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As already mentioned, this study aims to explore the gothic genre's potential for undermining and destabilising oppressive constructs. It intends to achieve this by distinguishing some of the composite and intersecting axes of oppression on which Black womxn's identity is formed. Therefore, this chapter will provide a brief overview of relevant historical context. Initially, it will give an overview of the history of Gothicism and discuss its significance as a tool for addressing cultural anxieties. The section will outline the progression of the gothic from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the modern day and discuss how, through postcolonial reimagining's, it has attained new power for the deconstruction of such oppressive structures. Then, it will explore the history of orality and mythology in Nigerian culture(s). With this contextual outline, I hope to ascertain that the increased popularity of the gothic genre for Black womxn writers lies in the ability to meld Western and African systems while, simultaneously, exploring and undermining the multiple axes of identity on which Black womxn have been oppressed in both Nigeria and the UK.

#### 3.1 THE GOTHIC

Typically regarded as originating in Britain in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the gothic genre has long been considered a popular, if controversial, literary mode (Hogle 2). It inhabits a space of emotional excess, with very few consistent tropes or thematic devices, which in Victorian era England gained it the referent of 'sensational' and 'flamboyant' (1), especially among the largely middle-class readership of the time. Indeed, gothic literature, and by extension horror, has a long and varied history thanks to its marked indefinability. As Hogle explains, gothic fictions "generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural" (2). Gothic fiction can thus be considered one of the earliest forms of

speculative writing, and a genre through which authors elucidate different cultural anxieties and address societal issues through the manipulation of ‘reality’ (Brooks et al. 2016; Hogle 2002; Khair 2009).

While over the years the gothic has attracted widespread new audiences across the globe, it was and remains established through Eurocentric, middle-class, white protagonists, typically caught between the allures and terrors of a past and the unavoidable forces of change that reject such a past (Hogle 3). Gaylard adds to this definition, asserting that the genre is rooted in the human urge to understand and control death and its manifestations through the control of time. In this manner, it may be considered that Gothicism is the fear of change manifest, with death being the ultimate, unknowable and unpredictable change (Gaylard 4). Here, we turn to the potential limitations of the genre – primarily, is it conservative or revolutionary (Hogle 12)? Such a question is pertinent because it is a genre rooted in the symbolism of difference, which was established in white Western thought, and saw its formation at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the peak of British imperialism. Furthermore, it is a genre that has repeatedly served as a vessel for confronting “what is psychologically buried in individuals or groups” (3) – thus, one which can be historically linked to the writing of Otherness and, effectively, oppression.

Markedly, Hogle outlines the gothic tendency to disguise social and ideological tensions in “aberrant and regressive forms,” which effectually allows authors and readers to divorce themselves from any ‘abnormalities’ or ‘deviations’ that trigger some anxiety (12). Typically, these are reformulated as gothic, ghostly, horrifying Others, onto whom multiple intersecting fears, anxieties, and desires are projected, resulting in concurrently terrifying and tempting ‘monsters.’ Hogle explains that in this Othering process, “standard, adult, middle-class identities ... stand out clearly” (12) as the obverse of the Other, which has contributed to the perpetuation of diminutive and degrading perspectives. Ultimately, the gothic’s liminal,

malleable nature lends it the capacity to elucidate and expose underlying tensions through Western constructs of “*high* versus *low* and *serious* versus *popular*” (Hogle 11, his emphasis). Resultingly, “all of the cultural distinctions it takes on thematically, whether these are based on gender, sexual orientation, race, class, stages of growth, level of existence, or even species” (12) find vocalisation and place within gothic constructs. Yet, the elucidation of fears does not constitute activism against them, not does it contribute to the dissolution of the systems that form them. Hence, it is undeniable that the Western gothic has historically been involved in confirming oppressive stereotypes and binarising constructs, concerned as it is with Otherness.

An example of the repressive and confirming Othering discernible in early gothic fiction can be seen in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1874). With the expanding British empire came 19<sup>th</sup> century British gothic fiction occupied with the Otherness of the colonies, or, more typically, the colonised (*Heart of Darkness*, 1899; *The Story of Henrietta*, 1800). *Jane Eyre* – so often analysed as a powerful feminist novel for the writing of Jane – continues this pattern as it inscribes Bertha Mason as the fearsome, colonial Other using gothic tropes. If, as this thesis claims, the Other acts as the obverse of the Self, and Jane represents the ‘standard, middle-class, female identity’ of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, then Bertha, as the central Other – the ghostly, Creole, madwoman in the attic who eventually burns down her prison-house and kills herself – serves as her fictional subversion. Hence, *Jane Eyre* exemplifies how the gothic relies on the insinuation that all ‘oddities’ “are a part of ourselves, deeply and pervasively (hence frighteningly)” (12). Therefore, the tension of *Jane Eyre* lies in the negotiation of identity between the two women, and, as a feminist novel it ultimately fails, as Jane can only find and claim her power through the sacrificial expulsion of the threatening Other: following gothic tradition. Thus, in writing Jane and Bertha as doubles, with parallel

stories, Brontë contributed to the perpetuation of degrading and oppressive paradigms, as she privileges one over the other, demonstrating a flaw within the genre overall.

In addition to being an example of the historically dichotomous, reductive nature of the gothic, *Jane Eyre* is also useful for exploring how postcolonial adaptations are attempting to complete the critical work started by the genre. It comes as no surprise that Jean Rhys felt compelled to write this novel. Actively engaging with the negotiation of power, and the questions of repressive social constructs leftover in historical gothic texts, her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), destabilises previously 'set' notions of Otherness (such as Bertha Mason's insanity). In challenging such a canonical text, Rhys "[transcends] definitions and categories" (Hogle 253) and reformulates the gothic novel, exposing its historical tendency to reveal power structures, without actively challenging them. In giving the Other both voice and history, such texts critically engage with, and undermine, repressive gothic tropes. Hence, *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies the malleability of the postcolonial gothic, and its significance in the dissolution of binary power constructs when this is the active goal.

Consequently, the tools and tropes for the deterioration of oppressive constructs have always been apparent in the gothic. The malleable nature of the genre allows for the deconstruction of boundaries – which historically has, and continues to, create room for the vocalisation of unaddressed and residual cultural anxieties. At the same time, we must contend that, traditionally, the genre was more engaged with demonstrating cultural fears rather than questioning them. Subsequently, with the end of imperialism and the rise of the postcolony, the gothic saw new life in the postcolonial imagining; its situation as a highly unstable genre, originating from a blend of genres, styles and cultural issues (Hogle 2) imbibes it with the unique ability to "symbolize our struggles and ambivalences" (19). Particularly, when reclaimed by historically Othered voices, the gothic demonstrates how "dominant categorizations of people, things, and events ... [maintain] convenient, but

repressive thought patterns” (19). Indeed, recently, it has become an ideal genre for the negotiating identity and resultant reclamation of power and agency, particularly when coupled with alternative belief systems, as will be illustrated next.

### 3.2 THE AFRICAN GOTHIC

The postcolonial increase in African gothic fictions, and even more recently, the explosion of Black womxn's postcolonial gothic fiction coming from Africa, implies that “[a] transformation of the horror genre” (Brooks 97) is occurring. This thesis concurs with Brooks that the “tools of West African mystical agency” (97) enable this transformation, as their integration constitutes a purposeful act of subverting mainstream horror through the rejection of Western epistemologies. Framing narratives within the complex variety of African cosmologies and epistemologies across the African diaspora is a disruptive act, as it rejects Western hegemony and recentres the African womxn by recognising their historical status in traditional oral cultures. Obioma Nnameka explains how, customarily, African womxn were “not only performers and disseminators of beliefs, cultural ideals, and personal/collective history,” but also creators, who at times exerted control over their cultures’ histories and re-centred the African womxn’s perspective (138). Broadly speaking, the pre-colonial African womxn inhabited a visible and active social standing as “producers of knowledge,” with the associated power to control the narrative (Nnameka 138). However, with the European invasion of Africa, language became a powerful tool for mastery over the native population, ushering in a decline in oral traditions. As the transition was made towards the written word, “women, as speaking subjects, ... transformed into written objects through the collusion of the imperialistic subject and the patriarchal subject” (138). Positioned as Other on the axes of gender, race, age, and more, African womxn saw their relegation to the edges of society, as they were denied access to education and positions of power. Thus, following the rise and fall

of colonial power, Black womxn found themselves rendered powerless, marginalised in societies they were once central to.

Ultimately, within this context it is unsurprising that the process of rewriting or reintegrating traditional cosmologies and lore is such a powerful method for the reclamation of Black womxn's identity. In doing so, such authors recognise long and powerful narrative histories that are, repeatedly, overlooked. Additionally, as agents of transformation, they can use histories to interrogate their gendered location within the postcolonial nation (Wilson-Tagoe 182). In particular, by disrupting and rewriting historical narratives Black womxn contest their position as marginal in the public and political domain and question the repressive ideologies that construct them as 'female and therefore lesser.' As writers of literature, engaging with the long oral history of strong female storytellers undermines dominant social constructs by acknowledging an African narrative tradition that long precedes colonialism and gendered binary constructs.

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to recognise the impact of male Nigerian writers such as D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola on third-generation Nigerian literature. These authors are widely regarded as some of the earliest writers to interrogate Westernised distinctions between the fantastic and the real. Rooted in Yoruba cosmology, their works are concerned with different modes of being and draw on extensive written and oral sources to question perceptions of life and death through the writing of disrupted time. Thus, these texts constitute products of radical encounters with death and the specific stylistics of colonial power in the aftermath of colonialism. Novels like *TIG* and *26a* recognise and participate in this literary tradition through their feminist adaptations and the re-visitation of masculine imaginative sites such as the 'eerie bush,' which is recurrent in works like Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1938; English translation, 1968) (Mafe 21). This, to say that, works like those of Tutuola and Fagunwa also

constitute acts of resistance, as they “critique the experience of colonization through the metaphorical landscape of the bush” (22) and acknowledge the Yoruba culture pre-colonialism. Hence, modern Black womxn writers are recognisably building on the activist, literary work that precedes them; but, in deliberately recentring womxn’s voices within their narratives they question the repressive effects of such traditions on womxn, specifically.

One noticeable trend across Black womxn’s postcolonial gothic fiction, for example, is the presence of “supernatural figures associated with particular cosmologies or mythologies” in gothic terms (Duncan 158). Oyeyemi and Evans integrate supernatural, spiritual figurations, such as *abiku-ogbanje* (Yoruba-Igbo), within their uncanny gothic Others (TillyTilly and Georgia, respectively). Furthermore, through the trope of twins – which are powerful figures in Nigerian myth – Oyeyemi incorporates the Yoruba *ibeji* figure, whose presence adds to the haunting tone of the novel and enforces the tensions between Jess and TillyTilly as Self/Other *doppelgängers*. But, before we turn to showing how such figures powerfully re-write the gothic genre and can become site of resistance we need to explain the history of these terms, and their traditional conceptualisations in Yoruba and Igbo cosmologies, respectively.

The figure of *abiku-ogbanje* in Nigerian epistemologies means many things to many people. They are generally regarded as “those children who are born and die shortly after or later in their [youth]” (Uche, O, and Uche, M 64) and typically configured as wandering spirits, whose status as “undomesticated” has rendered them “hidden, secret, beside the normal, [and] without a clear assertion” (64). Thus, as restless members of the spirit world, the phenomenon of *abiku-ogbanje* serves as “a constellar concept because it embraces various beliefs about predestination, reincarnation, and the relationship between the real world and that of spirits” (Irele 172). Essentially, in their situation as ‘born to die’ spirits, they are caught up in a cycle of re-incarnation that links them to concepts of death and its

manifestations. Uche and Uche explain how “most *ogbanje* are known for their constant dreams and nightmares” through which they “relate and communicate with ... the spiritual world” (69), hence they are considered to easily move amongst the planes of ‘reality,’ and disrupt linear understandings of space and time. As markers of Yoruba and Igbo belief systems, these figures hold strong prevalence within Nigerian culture and have been widely integrated and adapted across contemporary literature. Arguably, the inclusion of such figures throughout Nigerian literary history – from Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*, 1958) and Ben Okri (*The Famished Road*, 1993) to third-generation Nigerian authors like Oyeyemi and Evans – links them to the exploration of the impacts of (post)colonial and globalisation-related problems (Hron 29). Frequently, these problems take the form of oppression, violence, or exploitation. Hence, the figure of the *abiku-ogbanje* child in both the oral tradition and contemporary representations signifies the Nigerian navigation of socio-cultural identity “wherein the return to childhood often signals ‘a return to a certain ‘primitivism’ before one is circumscribed and crippled by social mores” (Hron 29). Thereby, the inclusion of mythological references in *TIG* and *26a* imply the work of resistance and the attempt at reconfiguring identity, in the Nigerian tradition.

Meanwhile, the presence of twins in both novels, comparatively, also recognises a longstanding Nigerian belief. Traditionally, twins were “considered of preternatural origin and raised emotional reactions oscillating from fear and repugnance to hope and joy” (Leroy 134). The Yoruba believe that twins share an immortal soul, split between two bodies, establishing them as spiritually powerful. However, this belief also implies that the death of a twin endangers the life of their living counterpart. Typically, this effect is mitigated in traditional cultures through the work of a *Babalowo* (community priest) and the carving of an *ibeji* effigy to house the lost half of the soul. Hence, there is a strong belief that twins are supernatural beings, with extraordinary powers and the ability to bring either “happiness,



health and prosperity upon their family ... [or] disaster, disease and death,” without the proper respect and care (134). Therefore, in many regards twins are regarded as fearsome figures, and in the past, both Yoruba and Igbo communities preferred to sacrifice one or both twins to avoid potentially negative effects of letting them mature. However, over time, the Yoruba belief has adapted, becoming the inversion of what is still the traditional Igbo principle. Thus, while in Igbo myth (as represented in *26a*) twins are traditionally feared, in the Yoruba systems (*TIG*), they are respected.

The line of reasoning I am pursuing in this study is that the reclamation of oral traditions and autochthonous cosmologies, combined with the destabilising tropes of the gothic genre, allows for the recentralisation of Black womxn’s voices. In accordance with Nnameka, it is noticeable that in the current post-colonial state, Black womxn writers are once again taking up the role of ‘composers,’ and “[reinscribing] their relevance as speaking/writing subjects” (138). By integrating African traditions with subversive gothic tropes, female authors are effectively writing their resistance against their historical oppressions and the resultant relegation to the status of ‘written.’ The deliberate disregard for Eurocentric conceptions of linear time and space, combined with the presence of a spectral Other, can be construed as examples of “disruptive acts” (Brooks et al. 246) through which their anxieties are exposed, explored, and resultantly subverted, and the notion of Otherness is complicated.

Comparatively, it is clear that the Western gothic tradition has, historically, relied on cultural dichotomies to engage with readers’ fears, often resulting in the confirmation of such fears, rather than their dissolution. Thus, in intertwining socio-cultural spiritual figures in their work, alongside other elements of Nigerian epistemologies, Black womxn writers reassert the complex belief systems that structure African cultures and acknowledge these histories. Simultaneously, they undermine the binarizing effects of the Western gothic

tradition and interrogate the systems of oppression that have repeatedly positioned them as ‘Other’ on multiple axes. In conclusion, “gothic interventions in African fiction reconfigure an established relationship between magical and ‘real’” (Duncan 158) and thus, the rise of the African gothic generates space for the renegotiation of identity through the destabilisation of oppressive Western constructs.

#### 4 WRITING RESISTANCE IN *THE ICARUS GIRL* AND *26a*

Both Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (*TIG*) and Diana Evans' *26a* are novels that, thus far, have defied categorisation. Many conflicting studies have analysed and explored them using psychological theory; as *Bildungsroman*; magical realism; and more, while this study approaches them as postcolonial gothic literature. As comparative texts, these debut novels, written by Black (Nigerian) womxn who grew up in the UK, bear remarkable similarities to one another. Both have been widely recognised as engaging in the negotiation of identity and the impacts of cultural displacement, and both apply an intertextual approach to the use of cultures, genres, and myths within the narrative. For example, in *TIG* there are overlaying references to the Ancient Greek tale of Icarus, Yoruba legends about *abiku* and *Ibeji*, and the European fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* (Oyeyemi 176). *26a* takes a similar approach, intertwining intertextual references to Western tales like *Alice in Wonderland* (Evans 131) with Igbo oral histories and myths regarding twins, and different epistemologies surrounding reincarnation, within the fictional narrative. These elements encourage the consideration that these Black womxn writers have crafted deliberately undefinable texts which comment on the negotiation of identity for Black womxn in the postcolonial world. Therefore, this chapter will outline some of the main tools both Oyeyemi and Evans have employed within their novels, namely: ambiguous framing sections, structure, the form and meaning of language, the inclusion of gothic Others, and the entwining of Western and African beliefs. It aims to ascertain that these tools establish the texts themselves as interstices for resistance, through which time, space, and Otherness are (re)written as acts of defiance – examples of which will be discussed. Essentially, in the examples below, the novels can be read as commentaries on the negotiation of identity for Black womxn in the modern day, in resistance against their intersectional oppressions.

#### 4.1 SOMETHING IN-BETWEEN

One way that *TIG* achieves the reclamation of complex identity is through the novel's title. Oyeyemi begins to destabilise our cultural identity and knowledge before we even open the book, as she subverts the Icarus myth and transposes his tale onto a girl. This is a clear subversion of the historically masculine Greek traditions and constitutes an act of resistance against the patriarchal omission of womxn from literary histories. Furthermore, although we cannot know how true to the Greek myth the novel will be, certain cultural knowledge suggests that this will be a novel about being trapped and being free; about creativity in darkness; and above all, about flying, falling, and the effects of hubris. Thus, Oyeyemi has imbued her text with recognisable elements of liminality and subversion, suggesting from the outset that this is a novel that will abscond classification and question our Western ideals, based as they are on androcentric histories.

Oyeyemi further establishes the liminal status of *TIG*, by positioning her narrative between different cultures – American/Western and Yoruba/African – in the form of framing epigraphs. Effectively, she destabilises modern conceptions of both cultures, as she structures the novel between these two literary histories. Opening the text is a quote from Emily Dickinson's poem, 'Alone I cannot be –' (1862). It reads, "Alone I cannot be – / For Hosts do visit me – / Recordless Company ..." (Oyeyemi 1). By starting the novel with the epigraph, Oyeyemi squarely situates *TIG* as a fluid, gothic novel, as Dickinson's work, like *TIG*, has historically defied categorisation, and few scholars agree on what genre(s) it constitutes. Additionally, Dickinson's works engage with themes of morbidity, religion, the transcendental plane of the mind/spirit, and the mediation of 'real' and 'surreal' spaces. Consequently, the choice of Dickinson for the opening establishes *TIG*'s gothic overtures, as both authors are engaged with the notion of identity in flux, and the power of Gothicism for vocalising anxieties. Simultaneously, this epigraph confirms the narrative as an act of

resistance, by referencing the long feminist history of (Western) literature and, in structure at least, adding to this history. However, Oyeyemi then undermines this reading, and establishes that the narrative itself is a liminal space, by closing the narrative with a Yoruba panegyric (praise poem), entitled, 'Praise of the Leopard' – thus positioning her narrative directly between cultures, times, and belief systems.

'Praise of the Leopard' admires the beauty, strength, and playfulness of the leopard, even as they hunt and kill, and serves as an example of Yoruba oral traditions and the cultures' long history<sup>4</sup>. By positioning such a poem at the end of the text, Oyeyemi's novel explicitly negotiates notions of culture and identity through the writing of *simultaneous multiplicities*. In effect, framing her text within these two poems highlights their similarities and differences and, by extension, does the same for the cultures they represent. Furthermore, Oyeyemi establishes the negotiation of power that will occur within the novel, as she presents a female, haunted, Western voice as the counterpart to a (typically) male, African, hunter. Consequently, Dickinson's poem links most clearly to the Westernised Jess, haunted by her Nigerian heritage (and displacement from it) in the form of TillyTilly, the 'host' who visits her without leaving any record of how, when, or where. In comparison, "Praise of the Leopard" can be considered referent to TillyTilly, who serves as the main vessel for Yoruba thought and imagery and is presented in turns as "gentle," "beautiful," "playful," and "hunter," "killer," "death," (Oyeyemi 323) – just like the leopard – throughout the novel. The poems therefore act as the obverse and reverse of one another on multiple axes, and it can be ascertained that Oyeyemi is aware of the "tight interplay of correspondences and complex intertwined relations ... [which govern] relations of similarity" (Mbembe 144). Effectively, Oyeyemi here is deliberately "summoning a world of shade" that destabilises Western notions of what is and what is not and implies "another side of all things" (145). In

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<sup>4</sup> Brenda Cooper explains how, traditionally, the poem was referent to the cult of leopard societies in West Africa, a typically masculine sect and offers an explication on the history and symbolism of the leopard in this setting (63).

questioning reality in this way, she creates space for alternative cultures and identities which do not fit either-or. Onto this space, she inscribes *TIG*, and crafts an ambiguous, liminal narrative that pays homage to both the African and Western traditions equally.

Similarly, in *26a*, Evans too engages with the notion of *simultaneous multiplicities* and establishes a supernatural theme in her text, in order to undermine the ‘facticity’ of Western social realities. The novel opens with its protagonist twins, Georgia and Bessi, navigating existence "before they were born" (Evans 3). With these words Evans instantly conjures a ‘world of shade,’ like Oyeyemi, as the quote explicitly questions the “distinction between being and appearance, the world of the living and the world of spirits” (Mbembe 145). Initially, Georgia and Bessi are constituted as liminal beings with no explicit form: merely “small furry creatures,” with “no fixed destination and no notion of where they were” (Evans 3). By writing them a “personal creation myth” (Mishan in Cooper, Brenda 57), Evans positions the twins outside Western notions of time and space and establishes them as *Otherworldly* beings. Evans effectively writes her protagonists as liminal, not tied to this world, life, or reality. The girls cling to the memories of their previous existence, their previous death, “petrified eyes staring into the oncoming headlights ... into possibility” as “it helped explain things. It reminded them of who they were” (Evans 3). Consequently, Evans engages in an “act of magic,” as she imbues the girls with an arbitrariness – void of what we consider substance – that confirms the novel’s worldview: namely, “the absolute does not exist in reality” (Mbembe 164, 165). Evans’ imagined world makes “*something* come into being – better, [it makes] *nothing* exist;” the novel correlates death with possibility and memory and Georgia and Bessi emerge from outside “the universe of crude, laughable, capricious *things*” (Mbembe 165, their emphasis). From this perspective, the twins can be approached as postcolonial Others, products of an in-between state which negates Eurocentric understanding of reality and consciousness. Thus, Evans’ engagement with *simultaneous*

*multiplicities* allows for Western and African constructs of reality to overlap. It establishes an arbitrariness to her signs and images, waiting to be synchronously emptied and filled, which encourages a liminal reading of the novel and demonstrates the multiple axes of oppression that must be resisted against.

Meanwhile, Evans sets up the theme of postcolonial resistance when she writes: “they began to sense they were coming to a road. One of those huge open spaces of catastrophe where so many had perished” (Evans 3). Intertextually, the quote contains a possible reference to Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1992), a novel that navigates the coexistence of the occult and the visible and presents it as a defining aspect of Africanism. Therefore, from a postcolonial perspective the linking of “road,” “catastrophe,” and “perished” is referent to the trauma of colonialism, and the price of ‘progress’ in both the colonial and postcolonial state. Thus, as Cuder-Domínguez states, “much of the poignancy of these fictions lies in the interface between the everyday world and a magical dimension” (280) as an imagined world has no need to perpetuate the structures of reality. Consequently, by framing her narrative with these fantastical representations of life, death, and in-between, Evans’ novel follows a structure similar to Oyeyemi’s, as she scribes her narrative between realities, in a liminal space, thereby establishing a structural interstice for resistance.

#### 4.2 EXPLORING ‘THE BUSH’

Fundamentally, in acknowledging the African traditions of *simultaneous multiplicities*, and conjuring liminal, surreal spaces within which their characters navigate their identity crises, Black womxn writers expose intersecting axes on which they are oppressed in the modern day. By inscribing the regular world with mythological, magical signs, these authors raise “tensions that, if unresolved, may eventually lead to death or near-death experiences” (280), the presence of which has clear gothic overtures. As Mbembe establishes, *simultaneous*

*multiplicities* navigate “the world of shade and spirits [as] also the world of night – reflections in water, mirrors and dreams, masks, apparitions, phantoms, and ghosts of the dead” (145), much like gothic literature. Hence, in merging conceptions of African social reality with Western ones, both *TIG* and *26a* qualify as Black womxn’s postcolonial gothic fictions, as they negotiate identity resistance using an amalgamation of cultural tools. In *TIG*, the oppositions of the past, the present, and the future; falling and flying; Africa and the West; haunted and hunter, are negated through their opposition. Similarly, *26a* balances the visible and the occult, and inscribes the ability to navigate and give meaning to the two, onto the women in the narrative. Thus, both novels eschew linearity and set up an ideal site for analysing different forms of resistance. By framing their texts in such a way, both *TIG* and *26a* demonstrate resistance against conformity and the marginalisation of womxn in Western thought. Hence, the novels can be read as the product of intersectionality and deliberate acts of resistance, which complexify the Black womxn’s postcolonial experience and elucidate their composite traumas.

Consequently, the texts can be considered “haunted proving [grounds] for ... selfhood as a hybrid postcolonial subject” (Mafe 22), in the liminal nature of their content and form. The adaptation and integration of the Nigerian, oral tradition of ‘the Bush’ is one tool with which they achieve this. In *TIG*, Oyeyemi transcribes traditional ‘Bush’ symbolism: “dark settings, uncanny occurrences, unnatural beings, and an underlying atmosphere of dread” (23) from a physical space onto a “wilderness of the mind” (Oyeyemi 191), which sits outside notions of ‘modern’ time and space. As such, she has successfully adapted ‘the Bush’ to reflect the Westernised Jess’ residual cultural anxieties and internal identity crisis. Furthermore, by replacing the traditionally Nigerian, male, adult, protagonist of classic Bush tales with a ‘half and half,’ female, child, Jess, Oyeyemi questions the androcentric narrative tradition and its implications (Mafe 22) and demonstrates resistance against the



marginalisation of African women across the diaspora by (re)centring them in a traditional discourse.

Thereby, ‘the Bush’ in *TIG* represents an itinerant space which reflects the diasporic subject’s displacement (Mafe 25). It serves as a liminal ‘third world,’ somewhere between life (this world) and death (the spirit world), in which protagonists must face their demons – both literal and figurative – and restore balance to the soul (Mafe 21). From this perspective, TillyTilly emerges as a vessel through which Oyeyemi merges the Western gothic tradition with Yoruba cosmologies and beliefs. As she arises from ‘the Bush,’ she represents the demons of African lore that reside there, namely, an *abiku* spirit. Simultaneously, she is characterised as a ghostly Other in the gothic tradition, whose presence embodies and elucidates the fears of the haunted (Jess), as will be discussed later. Thus, her existence reflects Jess’ positioning as a diasporic subject herself, whose youth and situation has denied her the knowledge of what her fears represent – namely, her dissociation from her Nigerian heritage. Furthermore, through TillyTilly, Oyeyemi inverts the traditional ‘enter at will’ trope of Tutuola and Fagunwa (Mafe 25), as she brings Jess to ‘the Bush’ without her consent, forcing her to confront her identity displacement (Oyeyemi 200, 304). This inscribes the space with an inescapability that echoes Daedalus’ labyrinth and reflects the contentious ending of the narrative, in which Jess’ escape from ‘the Bush’ can be read as either flying or falling. Thus, within the symbolism of ‘the Bush’ is the mediation and negotiations of multiple oppressive constructs, enabled by the liminal nature of the space itself, as it is written in Black womxn’s postcolonial gothic fictions.

One axis of oppression that rewriting ‘the Bush’ interrogates is the oppression of Black womxn in androcentric traditions, much like the integration of male-centred myths. Both Oyeyemi and Evans imbibe their texts with an underlying commentary which pays homage to the longstanding literary history of Africa, whilst acknowledging those who have

been doubly excluded from histories and cultural spaces. In *26a*, Evans achieves this by constructing ‘the Bush’ as an external, surreal landscape that the twins can enter at will, usually in dreams; within which they navigate their cultural and identity concerns. Like Jess and TillyTilly, Georgia and Bessi are presented as having the ability to traverse three worlds – this world, the spirit world, and ‘the Bush.’ However, it can be recognised that the ease with which they do so is in stark contrast to the experiences of Jess, for whom ‘the Bush’ becomes “a frightening place” (Oyeyemi 200) as the novel progresses. Assumedly, this is due to its manifestation in the presence of TillyTilly (as both *abiku* and gothic Other), and Jess’ positioning as a twin without a twin – thus an unbalanced soul. Meanwhile, for Georgia and Bessi ‘the Bush’ emerges after Georgia’s suicide as a space she must cross to reach Bessi in ‘this world’ – “I heard you scream and I ran ... I ran ... I began to wonder whether I would make it as all” (Evans 212), says Georgia, after her return as a spiritual Other. Thereby, Evans links Georgia’s ghostly reincarnation to ‘the Bush’ – confirming it as the final, liminal, space that Georgia must traverse in order to return – after she has faced her demons. Arguably, as an adaptation of Yoruba lore, ‘the Bush’ here also serves as the “antiquated or seeming antiquated space” (Hogle 2) from which the gothic Other emerges. This reading is encouraged by Georgia’s narrative description of the space as a “forest” inhabited by “witches in feathered skirts” and the spirit of Ode in Onia from their grandfather’s oral tale (Evans 212), thus, it constitutes a marker of historical time and traditional Igbo beliefs. Hence, Evans’ merging of Western and African traditions of social reality within her narrative effectually demonstrates Black womxn’s resistance against the binarizing, oppressive impacts they incur when they are presented as objective and internalised by societies.

### 4.3 STRUCTURING RESISTANCE

In addition to the aforementioned, formulaic elements of both novels, the layout of the text on the page is a significant device used by both Evans and Oyeyemi to mark important or subversive scenes. For example, in *26a*, Evans often uses the spacing of words on the pages to demonstrate shifting focalisation within the narrative. Short vignettes are often separated from the main body – such as the third-person voice, musing, “Where do they wander, the angry ones?” (Evans 103) – while emphasis can be placed on exciting or potentially transformative events. For example, when Michael Jackson is coming to London, the spacing on the page communicates Kemy’s excitement and focalisation: “Very soon, / Michael Jackson / was coming to Wembley” (109-110). However, in *26a*, the presentation of language most often clarifies the entwinement of Georgia and Bessi’s thoughts – “Georgia sipped her tea. Sex is ginger, she thought. / And don’t forget to sigh, thought Bessi” (112) – thereby either presenting them as oneness, or twoness, depending on the written form. In these examples, the written word communicates emotions, tensions, and elements to be considered, in a visual manner.

Meanwhile, in *TIG*, the written word often serves as an example of the subversive power of language. Oyeyemi negotiates the Icarus inspired themes of falling and flying and successfully adopts a transgressive approach to the Ancient Greek myth. Jess, “[like] the mythical Icarus ... must successfully navigate between [a multiplicity of social,] binary oppositions” (Mafe 28), including negotiating her new, doubled form – both as a twin, and as the antithesis of TillyTilly. Thus, there are many references to both falling and flying within the novel – most often when Jess is around TillyTilly. Oyeyemi, however, cleverly uses the symbolism of flying and falling in both the traditional and inverted sense. Often, a scene, feeling, or word is referenced with an inversion of meaning, which contributes to the overall

ambiguous nature of the novel. For example, when TillyTilly and Jess decide to trick her cousin and babysitter:

Everything seemed to *slooooooow dooooooooooown* ... TillyTilly's arms enfolded her from behind and pulled her

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and through the staircase, the carpet and the actual stair falling away beneath her feet as if she and TillyTilly were going underground in a lift that would never stop descending. (Oyeyemi 146, their emphasis)

Here, time and space are conflated in one scene, and both are inextricably connected to the presence of Otherness – namely, TillyTilly. Oyeyemi manipulates the reader's experience of time and space through the printed words on the page. Elongating the words, and formatting them to represent the movement itself, increases the fear experience when reading, as it builds tension and effectively destabilises the narrative. The directional movement of the girls through space and time is seemingly obvious here, as they are “descending,” “going underground,” and “falling” – emphasised through the repetition of the word “down” in its variegated forms (146). Oyeyemi later inverts what is clearly written as a downward, falling, motion, when TillyTilly asks Jess ““You know when we fell?”” and Jess, “[remembers] the flying-sinking feeling,” which TillyTilly then tells her is “not what's supposed to happen” (Oyeyemi 235). Here, Jess' memory of the falling feeling is inverted, and presented as a “flying-sinking feeling,” not falling at all. This is poignant as it destabilises the binary notions of up and down and flying and falling, thereby questioning the outcome of the novel, and the Icarus myth itself and, thus, the patriarchal Western literary tradition.

Furthermore, TillyTilly actively ‘pulling’ Jess furthers her condition as a gothic Other, as Oyeyemi uses her to “play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural” (Hogle 2), while using language and form to increase the tension within the text and the readers experience. Thus, Oyeyemi imbibes TillyTilly with the gothic power to affect even the physical book itself, further destabilising notions of reality and its oppressive constructs. Hence, in deconstructing and reconstructing the myth of Icarus in *TIG*, Oyeyemi has efficiently created interstices for resistance as a Black womxn writer. While acknowledging the literary traditions of the West and the thematic references of Icarus, she questions the androcentricity of such narratives by subverting its central themes. And, when applying gothic negotiations of time and space onto such narrative, concurrent with female-centred Yoruba mythology, she effectively undermines the science-oriented conceptions of Western reality today.

#### 4.4 IS IT A GHOST, OR SOMETHING OTHER?

Crafting a novel that plays off gothic tropes and formulas accommodates the negotiation of identity as the gothic is a historically liminal genre in and of itself. Typically, it negotiates and subverts the laws of space and time through its inclusion of gothic Others, in some form of the ‘undead.’ In *TIG*, TillyTilly represents this gothic Other through her ghost-like abilities and emergence from an antiquated space – specifically, the old Boy’s Quarters on Jess’ grandfather’s compound in Lagos. The Boy’s Quarters constitute a typical ‘archaic’ gothic space as they were built in the 1870’s, are “coated with fine layers of dust,” “faulty,” and “not fit for anybody to live in” (Oyeyemi 31-32) – yet concurrently symbolise the patriarchal structures of (pre)colonial Nigeria. Namely, the entire compound was built around a main house, from which generations of men have “reigned” (30), to home the “related relatives of male lineage” (31). Essentially, it constitutes a Black womxn’s postcolonial gothic space, as

it is an archaic site, which in name and history implies the marginalisation of womxn – thus, indicating residual cultural anxieties. Further, it produces a ghostly Other (TillyTilly) in a timely response to Jess' confusion surrounding the architecture and patriarchal history of the space (32) – arguably situating TillyTilly as the site on which residual cultural anxieties surrounding the loss of cultural knowledge are made visible. Hence, TillyTilly can be considered an agent of haunting through whom the act of being haunted becomes a “psycho-sociopolitical state of awareness in which the haunted is forced to consider the signifiers ... and the oppressions and/or repressions they represent” (Brooks et al. 239). Her disregard for the rules of (Western) reality forces Jess to confront social constructs of reality and thus identity – primarily in the liminal ‘Bush.’ Through their interactions, Jess is exposed to Nigerian culture, language, and folklore, and learns more about her own history. Thus, while TillyTilly is inescapably a malevolent spirit, her presence is key for the subversion of linear, unidimensional constructs of reality and identity, implicit through her effects on Jess.

In *TIG*, Oyeyemi further links such revelations to TillyTilly by presenting them as destabilising and uncanny incidents, advancing the interpretation of the novel as gothic. She establishes TillyTilly's spectral Otherness from the start, as she is described as “out of proportion ... too tall and yet too ... small at the same time?” with “narrow, dark eyes, so dark that, to Jess, lying on the ground, they seemed pupil-less” (43). Although these markers of difference are initially dismissed by Jess as a product of lighting, imagination, or something else, they successfully determine to the reader that TillyTilly is something *Otherworldly*. Her Otherness is also marked intersectionally, as besides the gothic, grotesque elements of her appearance, TillyTilly is described by her heavy accent, “too big” and “uncomfortable” looking clothes, and “ashen and greyish” skin (44). Through Jess' focalisation, she constitutes, at this point, a marker of pity and curiosity. Hence, Oyeyemi deliberately highlights the differences between the two girls and, in doing so, their

inconsistencies, as we progressively learn that despite her appearance TillyTilly holds all the power. This is a common tactic in gothic Othering, and can be interpreted, as Hogle explains, as raising the ghosts of “‘othered’ and oppressed behaviors, crossings of boundaries, and classes of people” (13) whose arrival/appearance in the narrative triggers the action of the plot.

Essentially, TillyTilly can be considered the main vessel, or tool, through which Oyeyemi undergoes her subversion of Western ‘reality’ in the form of time, space, and Otherness. This is indicated at the end of TillyTilly’s introduction, in which her ghostly qualities are further emphasised: “She turned and hurtled away from where Jess stood, moving past the Boy’s Quarters and around the back of the car-park in what felt to Jess, who could hardly follow her figure for the sheets of sunlight wobbling down, like seconds” (Oyeyemi 48). Immediately, although subtly, TillyTilly affects the time and space ‘continuum,’ even in Jess’ young eyes. Oyeyemi demonstrates TillyTilly’s destabilising presence on space, as the sunlight, which may, typically, ‘stream,’ ‘shine,’ or ‘beat’ down, yet is “wobbling” around her, indicating its disruption (48). Additionally, that TillyTilly’s movement seems to take only seconds indicates a subversive effect on time, which is mitigated and remains ambiguous through the phrase, “to Jess.” Here, Oyeyemi suggests the unreliability of an 8-year-old’s focalisation – a recurrent theme that contributes to the novel’s uncategorisable status and multiple interpretations. However, it can be delineated that situating Jess as an unreliable focaliser is a deliberate act by Oyeyemi to undermine and question Western perspectives. As established, Jess is portrayed as a British/Western child at the start of the novel and the plot trajectory resides on the conflict between this self-identification and Jess’ Nigerian heritage. Therefore, in writing Jess as the marker of Western thought in the text, Oyeyemi is not only establishing the unreliability of a child’s perspective, but also of a Western, Eurocentric perspective when applied to Nigeria. Hence, TillyTilly, in

her interactions with Jess, is a subversive and destabilising gothic presence through whom Oyeyemi demonstrates the multiple inconsistencies and differences between Nigerian and Western conceptions of reality.

Comparatively, *26a* employs the trope of gothic otherness through the characterisation of Georgia, particularly in the final part of the novel – “The Best Bit” (Evans 195) – with her return from death as an unembodied spirit. As Brenda Cooper explains, “death is understood [in the narrative] in terms of their multiple lives, as African and English, as human and animal [as twins,] and as part of the cycle of regeneration” (57). As a concept, death is unknowable, “an occult zone that constitutes a perpetual challenge to culture and appropriation” and an unanswerable question (Gaylard 14). Therefore, when Bessi asks, “are you ghost?” and Georgia “[does] not answer her” (Evans 212), she effectively retains her ambiguous status and rejects categorisation. She, like death, “remains impervious to appropriations, and embodies a perpetual newness and otherness” (Gaylard 14) in her spectral state. Not entirely ghost, *ogbanje* (the Igbo conceptualisation of *abiku*), or lost soul, she constitutes “a shadow of the Self” (Khair 13), in which the ‘Self’ is Bessi; Georgia’s “other face, the happy innocent one” (Evans 124). To claim this as *gothic* Otherness, rests on the reading of *26a* – Georgia’s characterisation in particular – through the lens of thanatophilia. She is constructed as a gothic Other and linked to death in the opening pages when, at seven years old, after the death of her hamster, she notices “it was possible ... to choose the time, to leave when you were ready” (Evans 14). Thereby, Evans’ four-part novel arguably traces Georgia’s four deaths. Firstly, her pre-birth-death as a small furry creature (3), then her emotional and mental death during her sexual assault (68), followed by her suicide (193), and, finally, her spiritual death at the end of the novel (230). From this perspective, each section expresses resistance against intersecting forms of Black womxn’s oppression based



on age, power, gender, (mental) disability, and/or the delegitimisation of non-Western cosmologies and social realities.

#### 4.5 ANOTHER OTHER

Returning to *TIG*, Jess also represents an Other on multiple axes, which eventually causes an identity breakdown. This Otherness is evidenced by the plot trajectory, which establishes Jess as a “socially alienated and psychically-divided child” (Hron 36), who already struggles to understand her reality in the opening pages. To Jess, “everything moved past too fast” (Oyeyemi 4) in the world, and it seems that her sense of self is constructed from only two stable factors, which she reminds herself of daily: “My name is Jessamy. I am eight years old” (3). She finds safety in small, enclosed spaces like the cupboard because she knows exactly where she is: “something that was increasingly difficult each day” (3). From the outset, then, it can be ascertained that Jess has a loose and crescively destabilised notion of self, which Oyeyemi links to her understanding of names, time, and space, marking her sense of Otherness. Effectively, Oyeyemi situates Jess’ reality as the only possible site for her identity to be navigated by physicalising a typically internal struggle and indicating this to the reader.

Consequently, Illot and Buckley explain, *TIG* offers a “complex negotiation of identity in which self/Other and here/there oppositions are collapsed” (403). It achieves this through its integration of Nigerian mythology – marking Jess as a twin without a twin, and thereby an unbalanced soul – and the construction of Jess and TillyTilly as *doppelgängers*. While TillyTilly’s Otherness is presented gothically, as uncanny, timeless, and internal, Jess’ is imposed upon her by external actors. For example, in Britain, Jess faces bullying at school, with peers who say “[m]aybe Jessamy has all these ‘attacks’ because she can’t make up her mind whether she’s black or white!” (Oyeyemi 86). These comments instantly position her as

an Other on the axes of ability and race. Meanwhile, in Nigeria she is immediately denoted as an *oyibo*, or ‘stranger,’ by an unknown man on the street (Oyeyemi 17). Thus, Oyeyemi denotes her Otherness in both societies and cultures. Through the characterisation of Jess and TillyTilly as markers of Britain, and Nigeria, and everything in-between, Oyeyemi comments on the perceived differences between nations that share dominant ideologies due to colonialism. The novel renders “any transformation of national space ... threatening [and, as a result,] the protagonist ... [is] effectively displaced, slipping between worlds” (Illot and Buckley 405). Essentially, the novel explores the diminishing effects of systemic oppressions when they coalesce within one body, while displaying the “impact of the colonial period in the present day” (Illot and Buckley 403) through Jess’ characterisation as the product of both Nigeria and Britain, thus, a postcolonial child.

Similarly, in *26a*, Georgia and Bessi are Othered on multiple trajectories, across cultural divides. For example, they are nicknamed “Spam” by their British classmates because “[their] foreheads were growing at a faster rate than the rest of them, Georgia’s backward and upward, Bessi’s upward and backward” (Evans 96). Here, Evans positions them as Other synchronously on the basis of their appearance and as twins; they are presented as an inversion of one another, thus implying the status of *doppelgängers*. Evans situates them as such by explaining how “the real differences, the ones that mattered most, were ... in the soul. There was light and there was shade” (51). Thus, where society views them as Other as the result of their appearance, which manifests in “widespread curiosity about their apparent worldliness, twoness, and strangeness” (94), Evans signals that they also engage in self-Othering, based on the internal differences between them. Furthermore, in Nigeria, Georgia and Bessi are clearly Othered on the axes of race and gender by their maternal grandfather, Baba, who serves as an example of Nigeria’s “deeply androcentric culture” (Cudar-Dominguez 284). As a representative of colonial thought and patriarchal practices,

Baba muses on his “exotic *oyibo* children, golden grandsons in a distant land” before exclaiming, “but where were they, these sons? Four girls, he counted, all in trousers!” (Evans 72). Hence, he is an intimator of reductive, colonial-imposed Nigerian systems which value binary distinctions, in this case benefitting masculinity over femininity. Interestingly, Evans also signals the colonial binary system that values lighter skin colour by focalising the children as “exotic,” “golden,” “*oyibo*” (72). Thus, Evans constitutes the twins as marginalised womxn on the axes of gender and race as they attempt to navigate cultures that repeatedly dismiss them.

As established, in using the trope of twins/*doppelgängers*/doubles, these authors are able to present multiple, overlapping perspectives on reality to investigate modes of Othering and its effects. In, figuratively, embodying light versus shade, both Bessi and Georgia, and Jess and TillyTilly are denoted as products of an irresolvable doubleness (Cuder-Domínguez 284). Caught between the dichotomy of Nigeria and Britain, their Otherness manifests in the dislocation from dominant social realities which carve out their marginalised and liminal existence. Therefore, through their presentation of doubled womxn, Black womxn writers are adapting the traditional gothic form to explore the tensions between social realities in the West and Africa, while revealing the reductive Othering techniques – both external and internal – that structure societies.

#### 4.6 REMEMBERING AFRICAN BELIEFS

As established, it is largely the integration and presence of African cosmologies within these texts that creates room for the challenging of Eurocentric social beliefs. The embedded Igbo oral myth of Onia and Ode in *26a* exemplifies this. In the legend, Baba explains how “A long time ago ... people believed that twins ... were a curse,” fathered by devils and witches (Evans 62-63). He goes on to tell of how Onia and Ode were “best friends ... even before

they were inside their mother's womb" – just like Georgia and Bessi in the novel's opening – but when they were born, tradition dictated that the second twin must be "destroyed" (63). He explains:

Ode was second – they set her on fire. When Ode was burnt . . . Onia got sick and wouldn't eat at all until Ode's ghost entered her body . . . But Ode could only stay for one year because that's how long it took for the soul to be ready to leave the earth . . . after the year was over . . . Ode left her – for ever. (Evans 63)

Evans clearly marks the African beliefs of paradoxical time within this section, using a traditional tale to foretell the fate of Georgia and Bessi, after Georgia's death. This foreshadowing is enforced later in the novel, in the presence of "Ode in Onia," who carries Georgia's spirit "miles and miles . . . in the body of a child" (212) after her death; just like Jess' dead twin Fern, the "silent girl" who carries Jess through the "dead land" of 'the Bush' in *TIG* (Oyeyemi 319). Thus, both authors navigate "the haunting of the diasporic Nigerian" (Bryce 64) on multiple levels. As 'half and half' children, women, and twins, Georgia, Bessi, Jess, and Fern inhabit a liminal space in both life and death, due to their Othered status. Hence, Oyeyemi and Evans navigate the intersecting axis of oppression on which Black womxn's identity is formed, through their central characters, and the presence – externalised in TillyTilly (*TIG*), internalised in Georgia (26a) – of African gothic Others.

Meanwhile, Oyeyemi integrates the *abiku* and *ibeji* traditions into *TIG*, establishing the Yoruba cosmological influences on the novel. Many scholars have contested whether TillyTilly, as the embodiment of Yoruba beliefs in the narrative, is an *abiku* spirit, a traditional gothic spectre, or an amalgamation of both. Reading her as purely an *abiku* spirit, however, allows for new conclusions to be drawn from the ending of the novel, especially when Jess' twin-status is considered. When taking into consideration the impact of merging Yoruba beliefs with gothic traditions (and the resultant inversion of both), the ending of the

novel is arguably “entirely ambiguous” – a status that has resulted in a proliferation of “utopian or transformative” potential endings (Illot and Buckley 405) by scholars (Hron, Mafe). However, this analysis aims to establish that, with knowledge of the Yoruba beliefs, and the liminal nature of the text overall, Jess’ *denouement* is, in fact, her death. This claim rests on the belief that Jess is a ‘half and half child,’ not only through her mixed heritage, but through her status as a twin without a twin.

In Nigerian belief systems, twins are regarded as sharing a soul, hence the death of a twin leaves the soul of the living twin unbalanced and thus their life imperilled (Leroy et al. 134). From this perspective, Jess’ destabilised identity can be linked to her unbalanced soul – a thought Jess herself has upon first learning about Fern: “Could it be that simple? *I scream because I have no twin*” (Oyeyemi 172, her emphasis). As Leroy et al. explain, the destabilisation of the living twins’ soul can be negated through the procurement of *ere ibjei*. However, in *TIG* both Jess and her mother’s dislocation from their Nigerian heritage means that no such measures were taken. Following the same vein, the Harrison’s situation in Britain, and the resultant denial of their Yoruba heritage, means that along with no *ere Ibeji* statue for Fern, Jess also never visited a *Babalawo*, a ritual that is meant to drive out evil spirits. Therefore, it must be considered that Oyeyemi is conflating Jess’ unbalanced soul as a twin, with her and her mother’s loss of culture as postcolonial subjects; a reading which is emphasised by the writing of Nigeria as the site of the “residual cultural anxieties” (Brooks et al. 246) which manifest in TillyTilly. Essentially, writing Jess as “only half a twin” (Oyeyemi 293), combined with the identity breakdown she suffers upon arriving in Nigeria, creates room for her haunting by TillyTilly. When considering TillyTilly as an *abiku* spirit, this reading is further legitimised. For, if *abiku* typically are reborn through the same mother, it must be considered that TillyTilly was the cause of Fern’s premature death. According to Yoruba lore, TillyTilly would thus be relegated to a spiritual existence, until Jess’ mother

becomes pregnant again. However, Jess' identity break upon arriving in Nigeria, in combination with her already unbalanced soul, exposes her to the malevolent *abiku* spirit that is TillyTilly. Because Jess and Fern already shared a soul, TillyTilly can access Jess once her soul becomes radically destabilised upon her identity breakdown, as she has already caused the death of her other half. Thus, TillyTilly constitutes an Othered presence, either as *abiku* in the African tradition, or a ghost in the Western gothic.

#### 4.7 THE REALITY OF IT ALL

Despite the inclusion of African cosmologies, and the reality of such beliefs for the people who follow them, some may suggest that writers like Oyeyemi and Evans are merely contributing to the gothic *oeuvre* of ghostly Others and their abilities. However, in both *TIG* and *26a*, the powerful, spiritual capacities of the womxn in the novels are presented as indisputably real in a myriad of ways. Hence the claim that Black womxn writers are engaged in the act of resistance against the dominant Western conception of reality and its implications.

In *TIG*, as mentioned previously, TillyTilly acts as the main vessel through which Oyeyemi demonstrates the flexibility of space and time. Her and Jess share the ability to walk between worlds and inhabit multiple realities at once (Oyeyemi 174). However, in the strictures of Western reality, these abilities are unbelievable, and TillyTilly is regarded as Jess' "alter ego" (276) when Jess tells a British psychologist about her. Yet, multiple, inexplicable events occur throughout the text, through which Jess learns information she would otherwise never be privy to. For example, TillyTilly takes Jess to her school bully, Colleen McClain's, home, where they witness an abusive interaction between mother and daughter, as a result of Colleen having wet herself (97). While there, Jess realises that she and TillyTilly can't be seen or heard, exclaiming "We're invisible!" (99). In the Western

understanding of reality, this would, of course, be impossible; even in the gothic tradition, Jess is not written as ghostly Other, thus these abilities are contradictory to her fundamental existence. Yet, later in the narrative when Colleen is bullying her in the playground, Jess tells her: “[there] must be something *weird* about your family, Colleen, to make you wet yourself every day, and there must be something *weird* about your mum that makes her go berserk ... and push your wet knickers in your mouth” (109, their emphasis). Later, Colleen asks, “[how] did you know?,” thus confirming the reality of it – and so, both Jess and the reader realise “there was no question that it had really happened” (111). Thereby, Oyeyemi unequivocally declares the reality of TillyTilly as a spirit who can navigate between layers of reality. As such, she marks the gothic qualities of *TIG* as not merely an elucidation of fears, but rather a deliberate choice for exposing the common understanding of Western reality which so often contributes to the oppression of alternative belief systems and their practitioners.

Meanwhile, in *26a*, Evans includes similar scenes to represent an alternative understanding of reality and ability. As explained, both Georgia and Bessi are written with the ability to walk through dreams. However, throughout the novel, this is portrayed as private ability, and thus it is difficult to confirm the reality of it. Yet, in an early incidence, the twins travel from their home in Sekon, Nigeria, “over the Mediterranean towards Neasden ... into their bedroom” where they watch the family who is renting their room to make sure everything is “unruined” (Evans 54). In and of itself, and in the Western understanding of reality, this may merely represent “homesick dreams” (54) and a child’s imagination. However, Evans destabilises this perspective and ascribes truth to the twins’ actions by describing how, “one night ... [the girl in the bed] opened her eyes and saw worried twins in summer dresses ... standing at her bedside watching her” (54). Hence, it can be seen that beyond the twins’ own minds they possess the ability to traverse space and bend time – to travel from Nigeria to London and back again in one night and be seen by an external, living

being. Thus, Evans rejects conceptions of space as only existent in the tangible present and confirms the indigenous notions of *simultaneous multiplicities* and powerful twins.

Thereby, Oyeyemi and Evans clearly demarcate the boundaries of reality as far broader than those recognised in Western thought. In their writing of twins as powerful spiritual beings in the Nigerian tradition and through their rendering as, concurrently, powerful, gothic Others, these Black womxn writers overtly question the linearity of fabricated time and conceptions of reality as stable and tangible. Consequently, they confirm the existence of multiple, parallel realities occurring in spaces uninhibited by constructed time, thus affirming the reality of African beliefs. Resultantly, through their depictions of malleable time and space and the re-writing of alternate, non-Western beliefs, these novels question the objectivity of Western reality and, by association, the oppression and diminutive Othering of communities.

#### 4.8 THE OWNERSHIP OF SPACE

Within the African gothic, the negotiation of space is a recurrent theme with overtures of colonialism, that implies residual colonial anxieties haunt the Nigerian subject. In *TIG*, Oyeyemi communicates these anxieties as the result of intersecting oppressions faced by Nigerian womxn across the diaspora. Within the novel, TillyTilly's possession of Jess' body continues the inverted presentation of colonial violence through a traditional gothic act. Jess is written as disrupted space upon her arrival in Nigeria when Oyeyemi writes, "the heat was emptying her out already" (12), suggesting her removal from England has exposed her cultural lack, and made her something to be filled. This notion of Jess' body as an empty space is reiterated by her grandfather, who warns her about TillyTilly – thus, acknowledging and respecting Yoruba lore – saying "two hungry people should never make friends" because one will end up being eaten by the other (240). Hereby, the belief in Nigerian cosmologies is



presented as necessary for the protection of the self and the soul in a reality inhabited by malevolent spirits. Effectively, Jess' dislocation from Nigerian history and culture renders her, like Nigerian communities under colonisation, as an area of "absence,' 'lack,' and 'non-being'" (Mbembe 4). As a result of this formation, Oyeyemi resituates Jess as the marker of Western thought and, thus, demonstrates resistance against the oppressive effects of British colonialism by inverting the act, having TillyTilly possess Jess' body against her wishes. In this scene, Oyeyemi deconstructs notions of time and space, while imbuing the act with gothic overtures, writing:

It happened in the gap between the seconds. Realising they were about to collide, Jess ... tried to step aside. But Tilly had already grabbed her ... then [she]

*hop,*

*skip,*

*jumped inside her,*

and Jess, screaming now,

*(You said it wouldn't hurt!)*

had changed her mind, and she *didn't* want to be at all like TillyTilly.

(Oyeyemi 200, their emphasis)

Here, Oyeyemi clearly situates Jess as an unwilling subject, whose agency is overtaken by an external presence without her consent. By inscribing the act onto "the gap between seconds" Oyeyemi marks the act as timeless and therefore constantly reoccurring in the African belief system. Further, she imbues the possession with violence, through use of the word 'grab' and describing Jess' screaming, before acknowledging the lies told to oppressed communities (before their oppression) when she writes "you said it wouldn't hurt" (200). Likewise, the imagery of the colonised state, and Nigeria in particular, continues through Jess' realisation, after the act, that "she was still in the room, but it was now a frightening place: too big and

broad a space, too full ... she felt as if she were *being flung*, scattered in steady handfuls” (200, their emphasis). Hence, Jess post-possession offers a paradoxical insight into the postcolonial Nigerian experience – paradoxical because she is representative of Western thought in the novel. She, like the African people under slavery, and in the postcolonial world, the African diaspora, is “scattered” and “flung,” out into “frightening” space, which is too big to be navigated, and “too full” of conflicting presences, systems, and beliefs (200). Thus, Oyeyemi elucidates on the degrading and violent acts within colonialism that has left people without access to or understanding of their ancestral, cultural beliefs. She presents this as a horrifying act through TillyTilly’s presence as gothic actor and, by rewriting the experience onto a young, light-skinned, female, she emphasises that the horror her readers (and by extension the public) experience in such situations is affected by our cultural fears and notions of Otherness. Additionally, by situating these acts ‘between seconds’ Oyeyemi marks them as timeless and overlapping, as they are constantly being re-lived by those who suffer them. Thus, the act of possession in *TIG* can be read as an exploration of the different reactions to violence and the appropriation of space, depending on the subject while, concurrently, undermining notions of linear time.

Comparatively, in *26a*, Georgia’s death leads to her sharing Bessi’s physical space in a willing event, and therefore offers an alternative approach to the appropriation of space. Like in *TIG*, Evans writes the act as “being filled up” and “very close to pain” (Evans 210), thus, a discomforting experience; as Georgia claims, “inhabitation is not an easy thing” (209). Furthermore, Georgia is reformed as a disembodied spirit; she sits firmly outside constructs of time and space, thereby, she must “find a way to fit her” (210) – her being Bessi – and not simply take over the body. Consequently, the twins negotiate the space they co-inhabit, as two halves of a shared soul, with Bessi deciding “you are the right of me. I am the left ... I am both of us ... Like a flame. It flickers Georgia, it flickers Bessi” (212-213). In this

portrayal of inhabitation, Evans clearly scribes Georgia as a being of power, who could potentially overpower and fully possess Bessi's body, leaning into her presentation as an *ogbanje* spirit. Yet, as doubles and mirrors of one another, they negotiate the space and together they support each other as two halves of a soul, stronger together than apart. Thus, Evans presents an alternative to the reductive effects of colonialism, engaged as it was with occupation, by presenting the sharing of space as a magical and powerful act that bridges conflict. Georgia's return as a gothic Other enables her to regain the agency that was stolen from her through her repeated oppression in life. She manifests outside the strictures of Western reality and, thus, the Self/Other divide is briefly healed through the twin's cohabitation. Hence, Evans shows resistance against the repressive denotation of 'the Other,' as "the negation of the European Self" (Khair 11) by subverting the Western gothic tradition and writing Georgia as a beneficent, although ghostly, Other.

#### 4.9 SPECULATIVE SANKOFARRATION

In practice, by delegitimising socially accepted constructs of time and space, and crafting narratives that explore alternative cultural approaches to such notions, it becomes clear that contemporary Black womxn are attempting to uncover the intersecting systems that diminish their power on a global scale. For example, Oyeyemi uses TillyTilly to explore the condition of the displaced diasporic subject. Serving as the manifestation of repressive thoughts, TillyTilly taunts Jess, saying "That's your problem! You always want to know where you belong" (Oyeyemi 248), continuing, "Land chopped into little pieces, and – ideas! These ideas! Disgusting ... shame, shame, shame. It's all been lost. Ashes. Nothing, now, there is no one" (249). Thus, Oyeyemi directly addresses Jess' internal struggle with identity and belonging, while explicitly connecting it to the effects of colonialism on the African experience. This excerpt highlights the interaction between social constructs and colonial

violence that resulted in the power imbalances which accommodated Nigeria's colonisation by England. In rewriting such acts through the gothic TillyTilly, Oyeyemi exposes the "haunting vestiges of colonialism" (Hron 38) and gives voice to cultural anxieties which have plagued the African subject throughout the passage of time, from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. Furthermore, in voicing such anxieties through a single subject, Oyeyemi engages in the flattening of linear time and, thus, speculative sankofarration. TillyTilly claims she is "a witness" to the bloodshed of colonialism (Oyeyemi 250, *their emphasis*) while concurrently shifting from "a little girl" with a "high, lilting, sing-song voice" (248) into an "adult" (249) who repeatedly tells Jess "there is no homeland ... stop looking to belong, half and half child" (250). Hence, TillyTilly acts as a voice for Nigerian womxn through history, whose multitudinous and intersecting oppressions are projected onto Jess as the product of ancestral conflicts and a representation of dislocated Nigerian people.

Similarly, Evans too flattens the time of colonial experiences using speculative sankofarration. Establishing the maternal line of the Hunter family as "mystical" (Evans 60) and powerful, Evans explores the feminist work being done across the diaspora, and throughout Nigerian history, through her depiction of Bel, Ida, Nne-Nne, and Cecilia as in communication across boundaries of 'modern' space and time. Evans inscribes these Hunter womxn as communicators of "the truths that were called superstition" (60) and, thereby, spiritually resistant against the physical restrictions of Western time and space due to their role in ensuring the survival of Igbo beliefs. Unlike the twins, who hold spiritual power through their status as doubles and sharers of a soul, these women maintain access to "a cosmological space in which the past, present, and future exist simultaneously" (Brooks et al. 242), as evidenced by Nne-Nne and Cecilia's manifestation within Ida, when Bel is in need. Evans writes how it is the vision of the future, in the form of children, in trouble "that makes a woman lose completely the order of things, the sense of past and future and what if, what

would happen. Ida and Nne-Nne and Cecilia's ghost went downstairs..." (Evans 131). Empowered by their strong and disruptive maternal ancestors, both Ida and Bel are shown to have inherited the ability to recuperate and revise their histories *and* futures as Black womxn, despite the composite traumas and intersecting oppressions that haunt their identities (Brooks et al. 240).

To summarise, this chapter has established some of the main tools used by Black womxn writers in their postcolonial gothic fiction to demonstrate resistance against oppression. Whether it is the form of structural liminality, embedded African cosmologies, the construction of gothic Others, or the manipulation of language, Oyeyemi and Evans exemplify the imaginative power of Black womxn authors. These devices accommodate the deconstruction of oppressive narratives, which have then been reconstructed with Black womxn at the centre. In addition, it has aimed to distinguish what gothic tropes are employed in such narratives and how their interaction with African cosmologies disrupts Western constructs of time, space and Otherness. Effectively, they undermine the image of Western authority, historically sanctioned by "assigning Africa to a special unreality such that the continent becomes the very figure of what is null, abolished, and, in its essence, in opposition to what *is*" (Mbembe 4, my emphasis). Fundamentally, these novels demonstrate the power of the African gothic in questioning the systemic Othering of autochthonous African communities on the basis of alternative social belief systems.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Black womxn's postcolonial gothic fiction is quickly becoming a new and effective method for destabilising, and enacting resistance against, Western constructs of social reality. Such authors employ a range of tactics to expose the subjectivity of Western structures that present themselves as scientific and, therefore, objective. Whether it is through the merging of African cosmologies with Western literary traditions, exposing the inconsistencies of Western reality – and thus confirming the “truths that [are] called superstition” (Evans 60) – or the recentring of marginalised Black womxn in popular narratives, there is a new generation of womxn writers engaged with the disassembling of oppressive structures that have historically rendered them marginalised on multiple axes.

Furthermore, as the products of multiple, intersecting oppressions, arguably stemming from androcentric traditions combined with the European colonisation of Africa, these womxn are uniquely positioned for writing resistance. As they occupy a liminal existence, they can navigate overlapping systems of oppression and, thus, expose the social constructs at their root. In the context of the African gothic, these structures are repeatedly emphasised to be Western conceptions of ‘modern’ time and space, established in scientific fact and therefore, linear and tangible. In acknowledging and integrating alternate approaches to reality in popular fiction, these Black womxn authors highlight the ability of alternate cosmologies to explain the inexplicable. Thereby, their inclusion calls into question the objectivity of Eurocentric notions, which are exposed as the products of fear and Othering techniques, rather than objective facts. In this study, Helen Oyeyemi's *TIG* and Diana Evans' *26a* were chosen as examples of such novels, as they similarly engage with Nigerian cosmologies surrounding twins, souls, *abiku/ogbanje* spirits, and different manifestations of Black womxn's power.

Overall, this study proved that these Black womxn's postcolonial gothic novels engaged most heavily in the subversion of constructs that render them 'lesser' on the axes of race, gender, and age. The use of young, half African, half British, female protagonists allowed them to explore a myriad of systems and social constructs in Nigeria and England that render them Othered. By contrasting this Otherness with traditional gothic Others and uncanny hauntings, they exposed the diminishing and horrifying nature of social Othering and confirmed that traditional gothic writing largely failed to undermine such constructs. Similarly, in their manipulation and inversion of Western time and space, they recognise the oral traditions of pre-colonial communities and re-imbibe Black womxn with the power to rewrite their realities.

Essentially, this thesis set out to investigate *how these two Black womxn writers use traditional belief systems in combination with the gothic genre, to subvert oppressive structures and negotiate positions of resistance, in connection with time, space, and Otherness?* By constructing a historical context of the marginalisation of Black womxn and outlining the discursive effects of gothic – along with its limitations – it attempted to expose *why* such texts are necessary in the fight for Black womxn's emancipation. The analysis of the two novels was key for highlighting that this is an active process, stimulated by the continued, systemic oppressions facing such womxn across the African diaspora. The novels offered many examples, aiding the claim that the interactions between African cosmologies and classic Western Gothicism demonstrate multiple *forms of resistance* rather than merely *elucidating fears* in the traditional gothic manner. However, in only focusing on two novels these claims cannot be made definitively. Rather, this study has only begun the process of investigating some of the many different, intersecting forms of oppression that can be recognised in such texts through the creation of imaginative interstices for resistance.

Due to the limitations of time, it was beyond the scope of this study to engage with more than one country's history and belief systems. Therefore, further research may take the form of a broader dataset, ideally from a cross-section of African nations. More extensive research in this manner would help prove whether this work is relevant to Black womxn writers across the African diaspora, or only Nigerian/West African womxn. Alternatively, more in-depth studies may focus on specific forms of oppression, such as the patriarchy, or xenophobia, to ascertain whether different imaginings are in interaction with certain oppressions directly. Further, future studies using newer novels would be useful to investigate and signal the different cultural anxieties that Black womxn writers are concerned with today. Finally, it is recommended that a comparison between feminist gothic fiction and Black womxn's gothic fiction be conducted in the interest of determining how race and the traumas of colonialism and slavery contribute to the depiction of gothic Others.

In conclusion, this study has proved that even in a post-colonial, 'modern,' and globalised world, there is much to be done for the emancipation of the Black womxn. This work has aimed to outline some of the myriad of forms that their resistance may take, while proving that perhaps the most powerful tool in this fight is the re-acceptance and re-acknowledgement of autochthonous cosmologies and oral traditions. Through these means, Black womxn writers of postcolonial gothic fiction are effectively creating new interstices for resistance, both literally and figuratively. Their works expose readers to alternate social realities and rich cultural histories, the omission of which has only contributed to the continued degradation of historically repressed Others, in deliberate acts of resistance. In crafting new realities that equalise communities and their beliefs these authors create imaginative fissures in which they undermine, if not undo, dominant Western constructs, thereby recentring the historically oppressed Black womxn.



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