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PREDATORY POLITICS AND THE METAPHOR OF CONSUMPTION IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVELS

MAMUDU, CLEMENT OSHOGWE
Department of English and Literary Studies
Igbinedion University Okada, Edo State Nigeria.
E-Mail: mamudu.clement@iuokada.edu.ng; ORCID ID: 0009-0006-2359-2194

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the figuration of political predation through the metaphor of consumption in four selected contemporary African novels: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). Drawing on Jean-François Bayart's theory of the politics of the belly, Achille Mbembe's postcolony framework, Frantz Fanon's critique of the postcolonial bourgeoisie, and Marxist literary criticism, the paper argues that these novelists deploy consumption not merely as a rhetorical device but as a structuring epistemology through which the violence of postcolonial governance is rendered legible. The selected texts reveal a persistent African literary imaginary in which political power manifests as an insatiable appetite, and the citizen body is perpetually figured as edible matter. The paper contends that this metaphorical architecture constitutes a form of narrative counter-politics, a sustained literary indictment of the devouring state that exposes the predatory logics underlying postcolonial authoritarianism, ethnic chauvinism, imperial nostalgia, and neoliberal dispossession.

Keywords: Predatory politics; Consumption metaphor; postcolonial African fiction; Politics of the belly

Introduction

There is a grammar of devouring that runs through contemporary African fiction with remarkable persistence and theoretical density. Rulers eat, while States consume, and citizens are swallowed in the process. The trope of consumption, as a literary figuration of political violence, recurs across a remarkable range of postcolonial African novels with a force that is neither accidental nor merely ornamental. It constitutes, rather, a sustained epistemological framework through which African writers have sought to name, anatomise, and contest the predatory logics of power that have defined postcolonial governance across the continent. This paper examines that framework in four major contemporary African novels: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). Reading these texts together, the paper argues that the metaphor of consumption in contemporary African fiction is not a peripheral stylistic flourish but a structuring literary ontology through which political predation is imagined, narrated, and resisted, and that in deploying this metaphor with such consistency and sophistication, these novelists constitute a collective, if internally differentiated, tradition of what this paper calls alimentary counter-politics.

The theoretical scaffolding of this paper is built on four interlocking frameworks. Jean-François Bayart's concept of the politics of the belly, elaborated in his landmark study *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1993), provides the most direct analytical vocabulary for reading political power as an alimentary practice. For Bayart, African political culture is characterised by the logic of extraversion and accumulation, a logic in which political actors seek, in the vernacular language of African politics, to eat: that is, to appropriate state resources, subordinate populations, and international flows of capital for their own enrichment. The beauty of Bayart's framework for literary analysis lies precisely in its double register: eating in his account is simultaneously a metaphor and a material practice, simultaneously figurative and literal, which places it in a uniquely productive relationship with the literary text, a form that itself inhabits the border between the figurative and the real. Achille Mbembe's theorisation of the postcolony, developed across *On the Postcolony* (2001) and his later essay "Necropolitics" (2003), extends Bayart's analysis by attending to the phenomenology of postcolonial power, its modes of self-presentation, its aesthetics, and its effects on the subjective lives of those subjected to it. Frantz Fanon's withering analysis of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) anticipates the predatory tendencies that Bayart and Mbembe later theorise, identifying the emergent African ruling class as a voracious intermediary that feeds on the body of the nation without generating any productive social value. Marxist literary criticism, particularly the tradition associated with Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, furnishes tools for reading the consumption metaphor as ideologically saturated, as a literary form that encodes and contests real material relations of exploitation and dispossession.

The four selected novels have not previously been subjected to a sustained comparative reading through these combined theoretical lenses, and the field of African literary criticism has not tended to adequately address the cross-textual consistency with which contemporary African fiction deploys consumption as a political metaphor, nor has it fully excavated the theoretical implications of that consistency. While individual works, particularly *Wizard of the Crow*, have attracted significant postcolonial critical attention, the comparative and theoretical dimensions of the consumption metaphor as a collective literary strategy remain underexplored. This paper fills that gap, demonstrating how the alimentary trope operates across different national contexts, different historical situations, and different formal strategies, while maintaining a shared critical orientation towards the predatory logics of postcolonial power and global capital. The argument that follows moves through six stages: a theoretical section establishing the framework; four sections of close textual analysis, one for each novel; a comparative synthesis; and a consideration of the relationship between the consumption metaphor and the formal structures of the novels themselves.

Stomach Infrastructure: The Politics of the Belly and the Grammar of Postcolonial Consumption

Bayart's formulation of the politics of the belly has the virtue of literalising what other theories of power tend to treat as abstraction. When he writes that African political actors seek to eat, he is not speaking merely metaphorically but pointing to the material practices of accumulation, patron-client networks, and resource extraction that constitute the everyday texture of postcolonial governance. Yet the fact that eating is simultaneously metaphor

and material practice in Bayart's framework is precisely what makes his theory so generative for literary analysis. Literature, as a form that works through figuration and trope, is exquisitely positioned to explore the space between metaphor and materiality, to render visible the symbolic logic through which political predation is naturalised, and to expose the violence that that naturalisation conceals. Bayart himself is attentive to the figurative dimensions of the politics of the belly, drawing extensively on oral culture, popular discourse, and vernacular political language to develop his account, and this attentiveness to language and figuration positions his work in productive dialogue with literary criticism in ways that more conventionally sociological accounts of African politics do not. His subsequent essay "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion" (2000) deepens the analysis by situating the politics of the belly within the longue durée of African political history, arguing that the logic of predatory accumulation is not a product of postcolonial dysfunction but a structural feature of Africa's integration into the global capitalist system over several centuries.

Mbembe's contribution to the theoretical constellation assembled here is to attend more rigorously to the aesthetic and phenomenological dimensions of postcolonial power, dimensions that are of particular relevance to literary analysis. In *On the Postcolony*, he argues that the ruler of the postcolony enacts his power through spectacular performances of excess, through the ostentatious display of consumption that marks his body as categorically different from, and superior to, the bodies of those he governs. This logic of spectacular consumption is simultaneously a political strategy and an aesthetic practice: the ruler consumes not only because he is acquisitive but because consumption is the performative language through which postcolonial sovereignty is constituted and communicated. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, developed in his influential essay published in *Public Culture*, extends this analysis by theorising the relationship between sovereignty and the management of life and death, arguing that the ultimate expression of sovereign power in the postcolony is the capacity to determine who shall live and who shall be abandoned to death. This necropolitical dimension of postcolonial consumption, the sense in which the devouring state not only appropriates resources but destroys lives, is central to the reading of all four novels offered in this paper. Fanon's contribution, meanwhile, lies in his insistence on the class character of postcolonial predation. Writing in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he characterises the emergent national bourgeoisie as a class oriented entirely towards intermediary and extractive activities, constitutionally incapable of the productive economic functions that characterised the European bourgeoisies whose positions and privileges it inherits without inheriting their productive capacity. This figure of institutionalised, structurally embedded appetite, of a class wholly constituted by and for consumption, haunts all four novels under examination here. The Marxist literary critical tradition, as articulated by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and by Terry Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (2002), insists on the relationship between narrative form and social content, arguing that literary texts do not simply reflect social reality but actively work through the contradictions of their historical moment, giving them symbolic resolution through narrative form. The consumption metaphor in contemporary African fiction is not merely a thematic feature but a formal strategy through which these novels negotiate the contradictions of postcolonial political economy: the contradiction between the promises of national liberation and the realities of predatory accumulation, between the rhetoric of community and the practice of cannibalistic individualism, between the aspirations of citizenship and the experience of being devoured by the state.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Wizard of the Crow: The Expanding Body of the State

Wizard of the Crow is, among its many achievements, the most sustained and theoretically sophisticated literary engagement with the politics of consumption in contemporary African fiction. Set in the fictional Free Republic of Aburĩria, the novel anatomises a postcolonial dictatorship with a Rabelaisian exuberance that is itself a formal enactment of the grotesque excess it satirises. The Ruler, the unnamed dictator at the centre of the novel, is a figure of almost cosmological appetite whose political power is inseparable from his capacity to consume, and the narrative returns compulsively to images of eating, bloating, and bodily expansion as indices of political domination. The most arresting figure in this symbolic economy is the Ruler's mysterious illness: a condition in which his body begins to expand uncontrollably, progressively filling the space around him and threatening to devour the very architecture of the state. Ngũgĩ renders this grotesque corporeal expansion with a satirical precision that is simultaneously comic and politically devastating. The Ruler's body swells in direct proportion to his

appetite for power and submission, becoming a corporeal allegory for the predatory accumulation at the heart of postcolonial statecraft. The image encodes in flesh and pathology the abstract dynamics of a political economy built on the systematic extraction of value from the bodies of the governed, and it does so with a vividness and visceral immediacy that no sociological account of postcolonial accumulation can match.

Simon Gikandi, in his authoritative study *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (2000), observes that the satirical mode of *Wizard of the Crow* operates through a systematic demystification of the rhetoric of national development, exposing beneath the grandiose language of modernisation the naked reality of elite consumption. The Ruler's proposed Marching to Heaven project, a tower to be built from Africa to the heavens with funds borrowed from the Global Bank, is the novel's central satirical conceit: a monument to the insatiable ambition of predatory leadership, funded by international capital and built on the bodies of the poor. The tower is not merely a symbol of hubris; it is a literal consuming structure, devouring labour, resources, and lives in its upward reach, and it enacts in architectural form the logic that Bayart identifies as characteristic of African political economies: the extraction of value from subordinate populations for the enrichment of the governing elite. Crucially, Ngũgĩ extends his analysis beyond the domestic arena to encompass the international dimensions of predatory consumption. The Global Bank and its representatives are figured as predators in their own right, consuming African sovereignty and resources through the mechanisms of conditionality and debt, and the novel thereby positions its consumption metaphor at multiple levels simultaneously: the domestic predation of the Ruler and his court, the international predation of global capital, and the structural complicity between the two. This layered analysis anticipates, in fictional form, the arguments of scholars like Ndongo Samba Sylla and Samir Amin about the articulation of internal and external predation in African political economies, and places Ngũgĩ's satirical novel in the tradition of what Neil Lazarus, in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011), calls world-literary thinking from the periphery.

The counter-figure to the Ruler's consuming body is the Wizard of the Crow himself, Kamĩtĩ, whose power lies not in accumulation but in speech, in the capacity to name and thereby to resist the logic of predatory power. Kamĩtĩ's magic is fundamentally a magic of refusal: he refuses to be consumed, refuses to consume others, and insists on a different economy of social relation, one organised around the principles of reciprocity and mutual care rather than extraction and domination. This formal opposition between consumption and speech, between devouring and naming, structures the novel's political imagination and suggests something important about the literary text's own political function. If the Ruler's power is constituted through the performative consumption of national resources, then Kamĩtĩ's counter-power is constituted through the performative naming of that consumption, through the act of making visible and speakable what the logic of predatory power seeks to naturalise and render invisible. In this sense, the novel figures its own practice, the practice of satirical fiction, as analogous to Kamĩtĩ's magic: a form of naming that participates in the resistance it depicts and that refuses, through the very act of narration, to be consumed by the discourse of power it anatomises. Ngũgĩ's formal choice of satire is itself, therefore, a political act, an enactment of the counter-predatory aesthetic that this paper identifies as a defining feature of contemporary African literary practice. The novel's encyclopaedic ambition, its determination to consume and transform the entire apparatus of postcolonial political discourse through the alchemy of satire, is itself a counter-predatory gesture, an assertion that the writer's capacity to comprehend, anatomise, and ridicule the language of power constitutes a form of resistance that no authoritarian regime can fully suppress.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun: Ethnic Predation and the Consuming War

If Ngũgĩ's novel situates the consumption metaphor primarily within the logic of authoritarian statecraft, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* locates it within the catastrophic field of ethnic violence and civil war, demonstrating that the predatory logics of consumption are not the exclusive property of the authoritarian state but permeate the social body at every level. The novel's account of the Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970) is saturated with images of consumption: the consuming hunger of the Federal blockade, the consuming violence of military predation, and the consuming ambitions of political elites on both sides of the conflict who feed on the bodies of the poor and the dispossessed. The novel's most literal engagement with the consumption metaphor is its unflinching representation of the starvation produced by the Federal government's deliberate use of hunger as a weapon of war. Adichie depicts in harrowing detail the bodies of children wasted by

kwashiorkor, the bloated bellies and reddened hair that became the visual signature of the Biafran humanitarian catastrophe and that were broadcast to the world in images that shocked international opinion and galvanised relief efforts. These images of involuntary, enforced non-consumption constitute a devastating inversion of the trope that organises Ngũgĩ's novel: where the political elites of the postcolony consume without limit, the civilian populations of Biafra are denied even the most basic consumption necessary for biological survival, and the weaponisation of hunger reveals with terrible clarity the predatory logic that underlies the consuming state's relationship to the bodies of its subjects. In this respect, Adichie's novel dramatises with novelistic concreteness what Mbembe theorises in the abstract register of political philosophy: the necropolitical dimension of sovereign power, its capacity not merely to govern life but to determine whose life is expendable in the service of the consuming ambitions of those who hold power.

Elleke Boehmer, in her study *Stories of Women* (2005), has noted that Adichie's representation of the war is structured by what Boehmer calls an ethics of the ordinary, an insistence on the texture of daily life and the human cost of political violence that operates in implicit critique of the grand narratives of nationalist historiography. The novel's sustained attention to food and eating, to the rituals of cooking and sharing meals that sustain community and mark the rhythm of ordinary life, serves as a moral and imaginative baseline against which the consuming violence of war is measured. When the war progressively destroys the household's capacity to prepare and share food, first reducing the menu to simpler dishes, then eliminating protein, then reducing the characters to the desperate expedient of consuming whatever is available regardless of prior cultural prohibition, it destroys not merely nutrition but the entire social fabric that food practices sustain and reproduce: the relations of hospitality, the markers of ethnic and cultural identity, the daily rhythms of domestic life that give existence its texture and meaning. Adichie's attention to this progressive impoverishment of the alimentary world is one of the novel's most powerful narrative strategies, rendering the abstract violence of the consuming war concrete and intimate through its effects on the most quotidian of human practices. The character of Richard, the white British writer who comes to document the Biafran cause, embodies a different but related dimension of the consumption metaphor. Richard's relationship to Africa is fundamentally consumptive: he comes to consume its aesthetics, its stories, and its suffering, to incorporate them into a narrative that will make his literary reputation, and his ultimate inability to write the book he intends, his growing recognition that the story of Biafra is not his to tell, figures in the novel as a kind of indigestibility, a refusal of African experience to be simply consumed and reproduced by the Western literary apparatus. This narrative of failed consumption is itself a political gesture of considerable sophistication, a refusal of the logic by which Africa becomes raw material for European cultural production, and it speaks to the concerns about cultural ownership and the politics of representation that Mukoma Wa Ngugi theorises in *The Rise of the African Novel* (2018).

The predatory political elites of both Nigeria and Biafra are figured throughout the novel as consuming powers that sacrifice the lives of ordinary people to their ambitions, and Adichie refuses the comfortable opposition between predatory elites and innocent masses by insisting on the pervasiveness of the consuming logic within the social body itself. The character of Odenigbo, the idealistic revolutionary intellectual whose fiery rhetoric of Biafran liberation provides the novel's political conscience, is gradually revealed to be deeply implicated in the very structures of privilege he ostensibly opposes, his revolutionary politics sustained by the unacknowledged labour and sacrifice of the houseboy Ugwu. This exposure of complicity within resistance, of the consuming logic reproducing itself even within the spaces of opposition, is one of the novel's most searching political insights, and it resonates powerfully with Fanon's argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the violence of colonialism does not disappear at independence but is internalised and reproduced within postcolonial society, manifesting in new forms of inter-communal predation, class exploitation, and gendered domination that merely replicate, in new configurations, the consuming logics of the colonial order. Ugwu himself, the houseboy who begins the novel as the most conspicuous object of elite consumption and ends it as its chronicler, enacts in his own trajectory the possibility of the consumed becoming the naming subject, the witness who refuses to let the consuming logic of war have the last word, a possibility that is central to the counter-predatory aesthetic that this paper identifies across all four novels.

NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names: The Global Architecture of Consumption

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* extends the analysis of predatory politics and consumption into the global arena, situating the impoverishment of Zimbabwe within the broader architecture of international capital flows, imperial nostalgia, and the consuming logic of the global North. The novel's protagonist, Darling, moves from the informal settlement of Paradise in Zimbabwe to the United States, and the narrative traces the transformation of her subjectivity as she moves from being the consumed to the aspiring consumer, a trajectory that ultimately reveals the consuming logic of global capitalism as no less predatory than the local political violence she flees. The novel opens in Paradise, an encampment of corrugated iron and desperation carved out of a formerly prosperous suburb, where the children of the dispossessed play a game of pretending to inhabit the houses of the wealthy neighbourhood from which they have been excluded. This game of imaginary consumption, in which Darling and her friends act out fantasies of bourgeois plenty by naming themselves after European cities and imagining their futures as cosmopolitan subjects, establishes from the outset the novel's central concern with desire, deprivation, and the consuming aspirations generated by global inequality. The children's game is simultaneously innocent and devastating: innocent because it is a child's attempt to make meaning from deprivation and to exercise imaginative sovereignty over a world that has denied them material sovereignty; devastating because it reveals the extent to which the logic of consumption has so thoroughly colonised the imaginative resources of the dispossessed that they can only dream in the vocabulary of those who have dispossessed them, a colonisation of desire that is itself a form of predatory consumption, more insidious than the material dispossession it accompanies because it reaches into the inner life and transforms aspiration itself into an instrument of domination. The political violence of Zimbabwe under the unnamed ruling party is figured throughout the novel as an act of collective consumption: the seizure of farms, the appropriation of resources, and the systematic consumption of the national future by a predatory political class whose rhetoric of liberation has become a cover for the most naked forms of elite accumulation. Bulawayo does not depict this predation primarily in the register of political analysis but in the register of lived experience, through the texture of hunger, displacement, and the daily indignities of life in a state that has consumed its own social contract, and this choice of register is itself theoretically significant, insisting on the embodied reality of political predation and on the fact that the consuming logic of postcolonial power is not an abstraction but a set of material practices felt in the bodies and psyches of those it dispossesses. When Darling arrives in the United States, the novel introduces a new and more global dimension of the consumption metaphor. Her aunt Fostalina and the community of Zimbabwean immigrants she joins are consumed by the American economy: worked exhaustingly hard, given inadequate compensation, required to remit earnings to dependants at home, and expected to be grateful for the privilege of being exploited at a distance from the more spectacular forms of political violence they have escaped. The structural irony that Darling has traded one form of political predation for another, that the global North's consumption of immigrant labour is continuous with the Zimbabwean ruling party's consumption of national resources, is central to the novel's political vision. As Tsitsi Jaji has argued in *Africa in Stereo* (2014), Bulawayo's representation of the immigrant experience is structured by a global chain of consumption in which the dispossessed of the postcolonial world are perpetually repositioned as the raw material of others' prosperity, a chain whose links extend from the colonial extraction of African resources through the postcolonial predation of African elites to the contemporary exploitation of African immigrant labour in the economies of the global North.

The novel's most theoretically rich deployment of the consumption metaphor is its treatment of the nostalgia of white former Zimbabweans for the colonial past, which Bulawayo renders as a form of consuming appetite: characters who inhabited the colonial order feed on its memory, nourishing a fantasy of racial hierarchy and material privilege, and refusing to acknowledge the violent dispossession on which that past was built and from which their present comfort derives. This figuration of nostalgic consumption, in which the consuming appetite of imperialism is repressed and transformed into a sentimental longing for the world it destroyed, is one of Bulawayo's most acute satirical observations, and it connects her novel to the broader postcolonial literary tradition of engaging with what Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (2013), theorises as the colonial matrix of power: the persisting structure of imperial relation that continues to organise global inequalities of wealth,

mobility, and life-chances long after the formal end of colonial rule. Bulawayo's achievement in *We Need New Names* is to render this abstract structural analysis in the concrete, vivid, and often darkly comic register of a child's-eye view of dispossession, creating a narrative voice whose very innocence becomes a form of political exposure, forcing the reader to confront the consuming logics of global capitalism and postcolonial predation through the unmediated perception of a narrator who has not yet learned to naturalise what she observes and who therefore sees, with disconcerting clarity, what adult accommodation has taught most people not to see.

Teju Cole's Open City: The Archaeology of Consumed Histories

Teju Cole's *Open City* approaches the metaphor of consumption from a different angle than the other three novels examined here, operating not in the register of spectacular political violence or manifest material deprivation but in the subtler, more insidious register of historical amnesia, cultural appropriation, and the everyday violence of institutional racism. The novel's narrator, Julius, a Nigerian-German psychiatry resident in New York City whose evening walks through the city constitute the novel's primary narrative action, is a figure of cultivated detachment whose meditative wanderings gradually reveal the layers of consumed history that underlie the city's urbane present. The novel's central historical revelation is its account of the slave history buried beneath the streets of lower Manhattan: the African Burial Ground, discovered during construction work in 1991, and the hundreds of thousands of enslaved people whose bodies lie beneath the foundations of American prosperity. Their labour was consumed by the machinery of Atlantic capitalism, their very remains incorporated into the physical infrastructure of the world their consumption built, their bones literally serving as the bedrock on which American accumulation rests. This consumed history, literally buried and built over, suppressed by the dominant narratives of national progress and prosperity, is the novel's most powerful instance of the consumption metaphor: the bodies of the enslaved were consumed by capital and then incorporated into the world that capital built, rendered invisible by the very structures their invisible labour made possible. Cole's excavation of this history through Julius's meditative walks constitutes a form of literary counter-consumption, a recovery and re-inscription of what the consuming logic of capital sought to erase, and it connects *Open City* to the broader tradition of what Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), identifies as the counter-memory of the African diaspora: the insistence on recovering and reclaiming the histories that the dominant culture has consumed and buried beneath its own self-congratulatory narratives.

Julius's Nigerian identity and his experience of racial capitalism in the United States place him in a complex and ultimately unsettling relation to the consumption metaphor. He is simultaneously an inheritor of the colonial past, a subject of ongoing racial capitalism, and, as the novel's disturbing late revelation forces the reader to confront, a participant in structures of consumption that his cultivated detachment has allowed him to avoid acknowledging. The accusation of sexual violence against Julius, delivered quietly and without melodrama near the novel's end by a woman from his past in Lagos, ruptures the self-presentation of the cultivated, aesthetically refined cosmopolitan who has seemed throughout the narrative to occupy the position of the observer rather than the observed, the analyst rather than the analysand. This rupture is one of the most ethically demanding moments in contemporary African fiction: a refusal of the consoling narrative in which the subaltern is simply the consumed and never the consuming, and an insistence that the critique of predatory consumption must extend to the practices of the cultivated individual as well as to the structures of the state and global capital. Aaron Bady has argued that *Open City* is fundamentally a novel about the unacknowledged violence of liberal cosmopolitanism, the ways in which a certain kind of cultivated, aesthetically refined urban subjectivity can consume the suffering of others without acknowledging its own implication in the structures that produce that suffering. Julius is drawn to beautiful things, to music, art, and architecture, and his consuming aesthetic sensibility is repeatedly juxtaposed with the historical violence that enabled the creation of the things he consumes: the slave-built foundations of Manhattan, the colonial history encoded in the streets of Brussels, the violence of racialised psychiatry, the suffering of detained immigrants whose cases he encounters at an immigration law clinic. All of these are incorporated into Julius's cultivated interiority without being fully confronted, and the novel's formal structure, with its quiet, digressive, inconclusive meditations that accumulate without resolving, enacts this failure of confrontation even as it invites the reader to perform the confrontation that Julius himself evades. Cole's contribution to the literary tradition examined in this

paper is thus to extend the consumption metaphor beyond the spectacular predations of the postcolonial state to encompass the everyday, quotidian consumptions of liberal modernity, suggesting that the politics of the belly is not a peculiarly African pathology but a global condition, an expression of the consuming logic of capital that operates across different scales and registers and implicates even those who imagine themselves to be its critics.

The Counter-Predatory Aesthetic in Contemporary African Fiction: A Comparative Synthesis

Reading these four novels together reveals both the consistency and the internal differentiation of the contemporary African literary tradition's engagement with predatory politics and the consumption metaphor. Each novel situates the consuming logic of power within a distinct political and historical context: Ngũgĩ in the authoritarian postcolonial state of a fictional but recognisably East African nation, Adichie in the catastrophe of ethnic civil war in Nigeria, Bulawayo in the nexus of domestic political failure and global economic exploitation in Zimbabwe and the United States, and Cole in the palimpsestic history of racial capitalism in New York and Brussels. Yet all four novels share a fundamental critical orientation: they deploy the consumption metaphor not as a naturalistic description of political reality but as a defamiliarising strategy that exposes the violence concealed beneath the normalised surface of postcolonial and global capitalist order, and they do so with a formal and intellectual sophistication that demands to be read as a shared literary-political practice rather than a series of coincidental resemblances. This shared orientation constitutes what this paper has termed a counter-predatory aesthetic: a literary practice committed to making visible the consuming logics that governance and capital seek to naturalise, and to imagining, through the formal and thematic resources of fiction, the possibility of social relations organised on principles other than predation and extraction.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this analysis are themselves illuminated and complicated by their encounter with the literary texts. Bayart's politics of the belly, as a theoretical concept, is sharpened and enriched by its encounter with Ngũgĩ's satirical rendering of the Ruler's grotesquely expanding body, which reveals dimensions of the consuming logic that political science alone cannot adequately capture: its aesthetic character, its grotesque performativity, its intimate entanglement with questions of embodiment, desire, and the staging of sovereignty. Mbembe's postcolony theory is extended and tested by its encounter with Adichie's representation of ethnic violence, which reveals the extent to which the necropolitical logic of the postcolony operates not only through the spectacular violence of authoritarian governance but through the more diffuse, decentralised, and in some ways more devastating violence of communal conflict, a form of violence whose consuming character is all the more terrible for being exercised by neighbour against neighbour rather than by a distant state apparatus. Fanon's analysis of the national bourgeoisie finds its most vivid literary instantiation in Bulawayo's portrait of the Zimbabwean political elite, whose consuming ambitions are rendered with a bitter clarity that vindicates Fanon's prophetic critique and demonstrates that the patterns he identified in the immediate aftermath of independence have deepened and intensified rather than being overcome in the intervening decades. And the Marxist critical insistence on the relationship between literary form and social content is borne out with particular force by Cole's formally innovative novel, whose meandering, digressive, inconclusive narrative structure enacts, at the level of form, the wandering, displaced, self-deceiving consciousness of a subject produced by and complicit in the consuming logic of racial capitalism.

The comparative analysis also reveals a gendered dimension of the consumption metaphor in these novels that has not received adequate critical attention and that constitutes an important contribution to feminist postcolonial literary criticism. In all four texts, the consuming body of political predation is predominantly figured as male: The Ruler's expanding body in Ngũgĩ, the soldiers and military commanders who consume Biafran civilian life in Adichie, the male political elites who consume Zimbabwe's future in Bulawayo, the patriarchal structures of racial capitalism and Julius's consuming gaze in Cole. The female body, conversely, is repeatedly figured as the site of attempted consumption: as the body to be subordinated, exploited, silenced, or incorporated into the consuming logic of male political power, a logic that is continuous with, rather than distinct from, the consuming logic of the predatory state. Adichie's Olanna and the village girl subjected to sexual violence by Ugwu in the context of the war; Bulawayo's Darling and the women of Paradise who bear the primary burden of political dispossession; Cole's unnamed accuser whose voice disrupts the

smooth surface of Julius's aesthetic cosmopolitanism: these figures insist on the gendered character of predatory consumption and demand a feminist supplement to the frameworks of Bayart, Mbembe, and Fanon. The material realities of gendered political economy in postcolonial Africa and the global South that these novels illuminate are precisely the realities that feminist scholars like Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, in *The Invention of Women* (1997), and Amina Mama, in her work on femocracy and state feminism in Nigeria, have theorised with rigour and precision, and future scholarship on the consumption metaphor in African fiction will need to take this gendered dimension as a central rather than supplementary concern.

The Metaphor of Consumption and the Question of Literary Form

A fully rigorous account of the consumption metaphor in these novels must attend not only to its thematic manifestations but to its formal operations: the ways in which the consuming logic of predatory politics shapes the structure, style, and narrative organisation of the texts themselves, and the ways in which each novel's formal choices constitute a deliberate response to the consuming logic it represents. Ngũgĩ's choice of the satirical mode in *Wizard of the Crow* is itself a formal response to the consuming logic of the postcolonial state. Satire, as a literary form, works by consuming its object: it incorporates the discourse of power into an aesthetic frame that exposes its absurdity and violence and renders it ridiculous, transforming the language of domination into the material of comedy and thereby delegitimising it in the very act of representing it. The novel's encyclopaedic scale, its Rabelaisian excess of plot, character, and incident, mimics and simultaneously critiques the excess of the consuming state it represents, enacting at the level of form the very logic it seeks to transcend. Terry Eagleton, in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, has argued that literary form is never ideologically innocent, that the choices through which a writer organises narrative material are themselves politically charged decisions, and Ngũgĩ's choice of encyclopaedic satire is fully in keeping with this insight: the formal ambition of the novel, its determination to consume and transform the entire apparatus of postcolonial political discourse, is itself a counter-predatory gesture, an assertion that the writer's capacity to comprehend, anatomise, and ridicule the language of power constitutes a form of resistance that no authoritarian regime can fully suppress.

Adichie's formal choices in *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflect a different but related logic. The novel's use of multiple, alternating narrative perspectives, the movement between Ugwu's, Olanna's, and Richard's points of view across different time periods, creates a formal structure in which no single perspective is allowed to consume the narrative, to absorb all others into its own point of view and impose a unified meaning on the fragmented, traumatic experience of war. Each perspective is partial, positioned, and implicated in the consuming violence it observes, and the formal effect of this polyphony is to resist the tendency of grand historical narratives to consume the particular in the universal, to absorb individual experience into the smooth surface of collective history. Adichie's multi-perspectival form insists on the irreducibility of individual lives to the consuming logic of nationalist historiography, enacting at the level of narrative structure the ethical commitment to the ordinary that Boehmer identifies as central to the novel's political orientation. Bulawayo's formal innovation in *We Need New Names* is her use of a child narrator for the first half of the novel, and her decision to shift to a more troubled and dislocated adult voice in the second half as Darling adjusts to life in America. The child's perspective defamiliarises the consuming logic of political violence, rendering visible what adult accommodation and habituation tend to naturalise, and Darling's frank, unmediated hunger is opposed throughout the novel to the sophisticated consuming appetites of political elites and global capital, generating much of the novel's moral force through this contrast between innocent and knowing consumptions. Cole's formal choices in *Open City* are the most overtly literary and self-conscious of the four novels examined here. The novel's affinity with the European traditions of the Bildungsroman and the essay novel, its dense network of literary and musical allusions, its meditative, discursive prose style that accumulates observation and reflection without resolving them into argument or judgment: all of these formal features enact a kind of cultural consumption, a drawing on the resources of the Western literary tradition by a narrator whose African identity places him in a complex, ambivalent, and ultimately compromised relation to that tradition. The formal question the novel poses is whether Julius's cultural consumption represents a genuine appropriation of the tools of the dominant culture or a capitulation to its consuming logic, and the novel's refusal to answer this question definitively is itself a formal and political statement: an insistence that the politics of cultural consumption cannot be resolved through aesthetic sophistication alone but demands

a confrontation with the material and historical realities that aesthetic cultivation habitually seeks to transcend.

Conclusion: Toward a Counter-predatory Aesthetic

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that the metaphor of consumption constitutes a major structuring principle of contemporary African literary imagination, a principle through which some of the continent's most significant writers have sought to name, anatomise, and resist the predatory logics of postcolonial power and global capital. Reading Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, and Teju Cole's *Open City* through the combined theoretical lenses of Bayart's politics of the belly, Mbembe's postcolony theory, Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie, and Marxist literary criticism has revealed the depth, consistency, and internal complexity of this literary tradition. The consumption metaphor in these novels is not merely a rhetorical device but a structuring epistemology, a way of knowing and representing political reality that illuminates what more conventionally analytical discourses tend to obscure, that is, the embodied, aesthetic, and subjective dimensions of political predation, the ways in which the consuming logic of power is felt in bodies and psyches as well as in economic statistics and political science data, and the ways in which it permeates the full range of social relations rather than being confined to the formal arena of state politics. The consuming body of the postcolonial ruler, the consuming violence of ethnic war, the consuming logic of global capital, and the consuming amnesia of imperial nostalgia, are not discrete phenomena but expressions of a single, underlying logic of predation that these novelists expose with remarkable clarity and consistency, and that the theoretical frameworks assembled in this paper illuminate with equal precision.

The comparative analysis has also revealed the counter-predatory aesthetic that runs through these texts a shared literary commitment to making visible the consuming logics of power, to recovering the histories and experiences that predatory politics seeks to consume and erase, and to imagining, through the formal and thematic resources of fiction, the possibility of social relations organised on principles other than predation and consumption. This counter-predatory aesthetic, as the analysis of literary form has demonstrated, is not merely a matter of theme or content but of narrative structure, point of view, tone, and style: the formal choices through which these novelists enact their critique of consumption constitute as integral a part of their political practice as the explicit thematic concerns of their fiction. The aesthetic does not offer easy solutions or consoling resolutions; it is, characteristically, a literature of witness, of surviving, of naming, and of refusal. Ngũgĩ's Kamĩtĩ, with his magic of naming and his refusal of the consuming logic of power; Adichie's Ugwu, who survives the war to become its chronicler and in doing so claims for himself and for Biafra the right to narrate their own catastrophe; Bulawayo's Darling, who refuses the comfortable assimilations of immigrant life to maintain, however painfully and ambivalently, the memory of what she has lost and the knowledge of why she lost it; and Cole's Julius, whose own complicity is finally and uncomfortably forced into the open: these figures, each in their different way, embody the possibility of a subjectivity that refuses, even when it cannot escape, the consuming logic of predatory power. In a postcolonial world in which the consuming logics of power remain as active and devastating as Fanon, Bayart, and Mbembe have theorised, and in which the forms of predation grow ever more sophisticated and global in their reach, such witness, survival, naming, and refusal constitute a politics of profound and enduring importance. Future scholarship might productively extend this analysis by examining the consumption metaphor in Francophone and Lusophone African literary traditions; by attending more rigorously to the gendered dimensions of the consuming gaze identified in this paper; by exploring the relationship between the consumption metaphor in contemporary African fiction and its articulations in African film, music, and digital culture; and by tracing the connections between the counter-predatory aesthetic identified here and the longer tradition of African writing that runs from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* through Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to the contemporary novels examined here. What is beyond doubt is that the metaphor of consumption, in the hands of the novelists examined in this paper, has become one of the most powerful and theoretically productive tools in the contemporary African literary arsenal, a figure through which the violence of predatory politics is rendered visible, contestable, and, in the imaginative space of fiction, resistible.

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