



Cannibalistic and Pornographic Images of Lagos City in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*

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Abstract— *The city is a spatial phenomenon that conditions the production of African city literature and reveals African urban life, experience, relations and problems in the aftermath of colonialism. Sociopolitical, economic and cultural issues have been of more interest to extrinsic critics of African city fiction than exploring the aesthetics that make city a universal subject in African literature. Studies on The Carnivorous City are qualitative towards the novelist's penchant for city-life, acculturation, human struggle, greed, love, corruption and other post-independent issues in Africa, yet, Kan's city fiction, like every literary text, has its form. This study, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by interrogating city as form in The Carnivorous City. The study examines the novel as an autonomous work of art and it adopts New Criticism, with a particular reference to "closing reading" and "reconciliation of the opposites" as analytic principles. The study describes the city as the subject of African city literature and portrays its pornographic and cannibalistic tendencies. It also reveals The Carnivorous City is rich towards the use of formal elements in the conceptualization of Lagos City in text, and indicates further that the novel is a city fiction rich in language, animal imagery and sensual dictions that portray Lagos as the universal subject in text. The study recommends a close reading of African city fictions as this approach enriches the artfulness of the sub-genre and sharpens the meaning of the urban literary texts beyond what extrinsic reading offers.*

Keywords— *African city literature, The Carnivorous City, Cannibalistic images, Pornographic images, New criticism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in the globe has been the agglomeration and rapid development of all social structures in terms of politics, health, education and economy. Madden (2012, p. 772) opines that "the era of global urbanization known for 'megacities' and 'urban hyper-development' raises huge questions about politics, social knowledge, space and city-life". Madden's opinion reveals that urbanisation deals with the sociopolitical, cultural and economic issues in urban space. It examines ways of life, politics and economic development in rapid growing cities. The African urban space according to Quayson (2014, p. 5) is "a container that reveals the built environment of roads, railways and buildings", as well as

the bureaucratic apparatus that dictates social relationships within the environment. A comprehensive description of African urban will paint a clear picture of the cityscape, its infrastructure, people and agencies regulating its politics. African urban presents a complexity of organized and unorganized environment which reveal the nature of built structures, social practices and relations that exist within it.

Packer (2006), using Lagos as an example, presents African city as an oppressive and a hierarchical space where people observe master-servant relationship and exploit themselves through imbalanced economic

relations, practices and violence. The urban critic underlines that African city exposes people to oppression, terror, sexuality, as well as inconvenience and arbitrary violation of personal space and body. The recurring message in Packer's work is that activities in African city are governed by a set of informal but "ironclad rules" which confine and force inhabitants to access extremely minimal spaces and opportunities that always come at prices that are sexual-coded and violently instigated. Edemariam (2007), supporting Packer's claim, opined that majority of city-dwellers always devise several means of surviving the violent and exploitative system that dictate every facets of life in African cities. Foregrounded in both Packer (2006) and Edemariam's (2007) studies is the fact that living in a complex and rapidly growing African city of the urban age brims both violence and reveals inhabitants ways of survival, of which the commercialization of human body (sex) is included.

The intersection between African urban space (city) and African literature is expressed in Quayson's (2014) opinion that African literature explores African city in texts and the city serves as a "permeable phenomenological" boundaries through which writers present the nature of African urban space, urban problems, urban relations and city-characters in writings. The spatial logic of African city literature always reveals the images of African urban society through a character who often navigates the city (inner city, slum, shanty, ghetto etc.) for survival. The African city has been presented as the spatial focus of African fiction in texts such as Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Zoe Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (2000) and Amma Darko's *Faceless* (2000). Others include novels like Chikwava Brian's *Harare North* (2010), Kwei Quartey's *Children of the Street* (2011), Kaye Whitman's *Lagos: City of Imagination* (2014) and Deji Olukotun's *After the Flare* (2017) that make "city" one of the prominent subjects of African literary discourse in the last decade. In the efforts to literalise African city, African writers use literary devices, figurative expressions and literary mechanisms such as "symbols", "contrast" and "sensory details" (imagery) that portray the image and conflicting nature of the city. They often present city as a determinant factor in textual arrangement and literary production.

For example, in *People of the City* (1954), Cyprian Ekwensi describes African city in its rawness. He presents city-life through characters (Amusa, Aina and Beatrice) that experience the binding effects of pain and calamities. Riche and Bensemanne (2008, p. 37)

aver that the city Ekwensi "loves so much and describes is Lagos and what he is mostly interested in is the seamy side of city life: prostitutes, pimps, forgers, burglars and crooks which crowd the pages of his novel". Ekwensi narrates the story of a young man whose dream is seized by the city, and reveals the politics that dictate the livelihood and survival of city-dwellers (Sule, 2017). *People of the City* revolves around the African cityscape, its people and its socio-economic complexities. Like Ekwensi, in *Alpha Song* (2001), Malik Nwosu portrays city's immorality and degradation. Nwosu's fiction is a well-written narration of sex, alcoholism, night-clubbing and political decadence in twenty-first century African city. Akande (2016) affirms that Nwosu sees immorality (especially sex) as a regular feature of city life. Nwosu's protagonist (Taneba) refuses to marry a twenty-six-year-old woman in the city because she is reportedly a virgin. Taneba's claim that a twenty-six-year-old virgin needs to visit a psychologist illustrates the city as an immoral and sexual landscape. Nwosu's fiction also captures, through Taneba (who changes his name thrice), that city's inhabitants often misuse the freedom city affords them.

South African writer, Johan van Wyk, describes African city and social decadence in his twenty-first century fiction, *Man Bitch* (2002). Van Wyk's novel deals with sexual relationships between a white man and young black women in post-apartheid South Africa (Andries, 2005). In his study on city in post-apartheid narratives, McNulty (2005) reveals that the slum and inner-city suburb where *Man Bitch* is set is a reflection of an area in Durban (South Africa) that houses array of drug pushers, prostitutes, and illegal immigrants. Van Wyk's novel focuses on the high level of social decadence that dominates twenty-first century African cities. In his review of Johan van Wyk's *Man Bitch*, Nkosi (2005) states that van Wyk's protagonist's (Wyk) movement to the inner-city of Durban is not only for sexual excitement, but also the meaning of life. The inner-city of Durban which van Wyk regularly describes as "hell" in his biographical novel is a symbol of a lost landscape, an image of city degradation and a base of iniquity where drugs and girls are for sale on every street corner.

African writers conceptualise African city in writings by focusing on salient issues (themes) in African urban-space and using images that captures the city in realness. The selected African city writings discussed (above) corroborate Myers' (2010) idea that African literature of city is a form of literature that reveals the sociopolitical and economic conditions of city's inhabitants in postcolonial African society. The works of Ekwensi, Nwosu and van Wyk are examples of African

novels that describe the complex nature of African city, its sociopolitical forces, practices and unmitigated crises in form. The language, images, symbols, literary mechanisms, devices and figurative languages employed by African writers in describing African city as the spatial focus of African fiction are worth studying. The New Critical evaluation of both cannibalistic and pornographic images of Lagos City in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City* is, therefore, properly informed by the formal elements in the text, and Awosika's (1977) idea that formal elements in African fiction allow writers present their subject matters in concrete "physical details". A close reading of *The Carnivorous City*, looking at concrete, intrinsic and "physical details" as language, animal imagery and sensual dictions on a textual page allows the appropriation of the text as a city fiction, and also portrays the pornographic and cannibalistic tendencies of African urban space.

Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*: A Critical Overview

Kan's *The Carnivorous City* is a novel that describes Lagos in its rawness and reality. Adedayo (2017) reveals that Kan's *The Carnivorous City* presents the story of love, greed, identity, reality and human struggle in the city of Lagos. His essay reveals that Kan's novel serves as a tour guide to the City of Lagos, taking into account the experiences of its dwellers. The critic maintains that Lagos is the "carnivorous city" that devours Abel's brother (Sabato— a Lagos Big Boy) in the novel. The critic clearly uncovers the conceptualisation of Lagos City in Kan's *The Carnivorous City*. He explains that Kan captures Lagos in its realness and presents the actions of big city-characters who always engage in shady deals to strengthen their economic power. He concludes that Kan does not only present the reality one finds in Lagos City, but also, the —tranchesl of humanity and inhumanity that show the writer's understanding of the city in which he lives. Kan's focus on city in *The Carnivorous City* according to Adedayo (2017) shows African cities have a voracious appetite for human flesh which can never be tamed by men or women.

In a different study, Akande (2019) explores futurities and the urban space in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*. She interrogates the physical environment of the city described in Kan's fiction and submits that the futurity of Lagos, the setting of Kan's novel, is predisposed towards violence and corruption. The central theme in Akande's study is that the environment and the experiences of characters in *The Carnivorous City* are realities and testaments of what will dominate metropolitan African cities in the future.

Akande argues further that the death of Abel's brother (Sabato) and evidences of his dirty deals project the idea that African cities are socially structured on violence and corruption. Akande states that Toni Kan's fiction describes Lagos in a way not too dissimilar to everyday city's occurrences. He concludes (in his essay) that *The Carnivorous City* reveals the futurities and conflicting nature of city-characters who occupy the space between survival and struggle.

Dorcas (2018) investigates crime and transculturation in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*. She submits that Kan's novel fictionalises crime and detection. The death of Sabato (to Dorcas) and the chaotic experience of Abel in Mushin (a suburb of Lagos City) are elements that qualify Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City* as an African urban crime fiction. The novel presents city criminals, crime, victims and detection that are relics of rapidly urbanizing African cities. In the same essay, Dorcas highlights that Abel (as a character) in Kan's fiction portrays unavoidable transculturation that exists in African cities. She (2018, p. 24) comments that —in the course of searching for his brother (Soni Sabato), Abel had become so lost and embedded in the life Lagos presents that he had his focus shifted. The critic's comment on Abel in Kan's *The Carnivorous City* simply buttresses her idea that characters always change (most times) from being moral to immoral on arriving African metropolitan cities. Abel (as Dorcas explains) is an embodiment of transculturation in Kan's fiction. He does not only spend his late brother's illegal money, he also engages in sexual tensions which are against his morals before coming to Lagos.

In the above studies, it is clear that Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City* mediates between a fast-moving African metropolitan city and its inhabitants. The extrinsic connections between Kan's novel and African city (Lagos) are well established by these scholars. They look into themes, setting and characterisation in Kan's fiction without (necessarily) looking at the city narrative as a self-sufficient entity that artistically describes the city as an important landscape in African literature of the urban space. For this reason, the text is evaluated through New Criticism, and the formal features of the novels reveal how the authors have rendered the images of African city, Lagos, in writing.

The New Criticism

New Criticism, popularized by the works of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, W. K. Wimsatt, Monroe Beardsley and others, focuses on the formal properties of a text to explicate meaning. Ogunpitan (1999, p. 127) avers that

New Critics “pay close and careful attention to the language, form and structure of the literary texts while regarding individual texts as the principal object of critical investigation”. New Criticism sees the evaluation of a literary text as the study of its unique structure and organized language. They shared with Russian Formalists the idea that literary language is different from the language of ordinary speech, and the text is a self-sufficient entity that needs independent study (intrinsic). Kennedy and Gioia (2007, p. 1508) state that “New Critics regard literature as a unique form of human knowledge that needs to be examined on its own terms”. Abrams and Harpham (2012) emphasise that New Critics, unlike Russian Formalists, do not aim at using scientific means to determine the “literariness” of literature, instead, they aim at explicating the contribution of linguistic system and literary technique to the wholeness and meaning-making of a literary text. They annexed both meaning and form by maintaining that texts are unified through patterns, structures, literary devices and techniques which are formal properties that separate literary texts from non-literary speeches (Waugh, 2006).

Among New Critical tools, the principles of “close reading” and “reconciliation of the opposites” (Golban and Ciobanu, 2008; Habib, 2005; Gillespie, 2010) are adopted for this study. New Critics’ idea of close reading, mainly derived from Richard and Empson’s works, emphasizes a detailed analysis of a literary text. Selden, Widdowson and Brooker (2005, p. 19) put it that close reading examines how the text “achieves its ‘order and harmony’, and how it contains and resolves ‘irony’, ‘paradox’, ‘tension’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘ambiguity’ in a text. It is clear that close reading entails a careful annotation and explication of a text by evaluating peculiar literary devices and techniques that make the text an organic entity. In other view, Culler (1997) reiterates that close reading explores the formal features of a text and reveals their effects and contributions to its unified structure. It is an intrinsic method of study that places the text under a disciplined reading. New Critics’ concept of “close reading” is a careful analysis of a text’s patterns, syntax, symbols, images, tones and literary techniques to support the belief that a text can be best understood through the explication of its form.

New Critics’ idea of “reconciliation of the opposites” reveals that a literary work expresses universal truth through the annexation of contrastive phenomena. In the words of Golban and Ciobanu (2008, p. 70), “reconciliation of the opposites reveals the way a particular literary text expresses universal truths in didactic pairs (language vs. meaning, spirit vs. matter,

content vs. form, subsumable under the rubric the universal vs. the particular)”. The critics’ words establish that New Criticism evaluates how a literary text presents a universal subject through conflicting linguistic structures and contrastive language devices. The idea of “reconciliation of the opposites” informs New Critics idea that “the greatest literary works are universal; their wholeness and aesthetic harmony transcends the specific particularities they describe” (Da Yanni, 2000, p. 381). Both “close reading” and “reconciliation of the opposites” serve as analytic principles for the explication and isolation of literary language, symbols, devices, incidents, speeches and spectacles that point at cannibalistic and pornographic images of Lagos City in Kan’s *The Carnivorous City*.

Cannibalistic Images of Lagos City in Toni Kan’s *The Carnivorous City*

Toni Kan’s *The Carnivorous City* centres on Lagos’ metropolitan space. It revolves around the city’s landscape, its dwellers and commercial activities. Lagos is described as a chaotic space that influences city’s inhabitants. In Kan’s novel, the city is portrayed as a carnivore that devours human flesh. Kan uses language, animal imagery and literary devices to portray Lagos as a violent beast that preys on human’s flesh. This is revealed:

Lagos is a beast with bared fangs and a voracious appetite for human flesh. Walk through its neighbourhoods, from the gated community of Ikoyi and Victoria Island to Lekki and beyond, to the riotous warrens of streets and alleyways on the mainland, and you can tell that this is a carnivorous city. Life is not just brutish— it is short. (pp. 34)

In the above passage, Kan metaphorically compares Lagos to a beast (“Lagos is a beast”). He uses animal imagery, “a beast with bared fangs”, and adjective “voracious” to reveal the carnivorous nature of the city. “Through”, “from”, “to” and “beyond” are prepositions that reveal Lagos’ landmarks and its unconfined cannibalism. Kan uses parallel exposition, “life is not just brutish— it is short”, to describe Lagos’s bestiality and violence against inhabitants.

In *The Carnivorous City*, the city cannibalises in different ways. Kan exaggerates that “a million quick, sad ways” (pp. 34) have been invented by “evil genius” (oxymoron) to kill people in Lagos. This narrative proves this:

Fall off a molue, fall prey to ritual killers, be pushed out of a moving danfo

by one-chance robbers, fall into an open gutter in the rain, be electrocuted in your shop, be killed by your domestic staff, jump off the Third Mainland Bridge, get shot by armed robbers, get hit by a stray bullet from a policeman extorting motorists, get rammed by a vehicle that veers off the road into pedestrian's walkway, die in a fire, get crushed in a collapsing building. You could count the ways and there would still be many others. (pp. 34)

"Fall off", "pushed out", "fall into" and "jump into", "pushed", "electrocuted", "killed", "shot", "hit", "rammed", "die" and "crushed" (phrasal verbs/verbs) portray Lagos' violence and cannibalism. The carnivorous city is the home of city's dark-agents like "ritual killers" and "one-chance robbers" and danger ("moving vehicle" "fire" and "stray bullet"). The city in Kan's novel causes disasters and breathes violence on Lagosians.

Despite this, the city continues to appeal to people who seek fortunes and economic relevance. Kan reveals:

Yet, like crazed moths disdaining the rage of the flame, we keep gravitating towards Lagos, compelled by some centrifugal force that defies reason and willpower. We come, take our chances, hoping that we will be luckier than the next man, willing ourselves to believe that while our fortune lies here, the myriad evils that traverse the city of Lagos will never meet us with bared fangs. (pp. 35)

The adverb "yet" initiates reasons people migrate to Lagos despite its cannibalism. They move to the city on a quest to make meaning out of life. Kan uses simile to compare people's boldness to gravitate towards Lagos' landscape to a "moths disdaining the rage of the flame". The animal imagery, "bared fangs", reveals Lagos' cannibalism and dangers inhabitants hope to survive. The city, Lagos, is presented as a beast associated with threats and troubles.

The images of cannibal rage in Kan's novel are plotted around Abel's (a school teacher in Asaba) experience in Lagos and his efforts to unearth the mysterious disappearance of his wealthy brother, Soni, who is a popular Lagos Big Boy. Soni's (Sabato Rabato) disappearance is a catalyst that projects Lagos' carnivorousness. This is evidenced in Ada's (Soni's wife)

text, *Soni is missing* (pp. 9), to Abel in opening of the novel.

Ada's message is the first sentence in *The Carnivorous City*. It is foregrounded (italicised and occupies a single line) to reveal its impact on Kan's plot. "*Soni is missing*" is rendered in a tone (assertive) that propels myriad of meanings. It is a simple sentence that shapes and influences every event in Kan's fiction. This is revealed in this passage:

Three simple words that seemed as if a life time has been compressed into them, a lethal payload of pain and fear waiting to detonate and decimate. Those delivered words shocked and calmed in equal measure, like a letter bearing bad news long after its contents have been known. (pp. 9)

"A payload of pain and fear" is an exaggerative statement that describes the unpredictable disaster inherent in "*Soni is missing*". Kan uses simile, "as if a life time..." and "like a letter bearing bad news...", and oxymoron, "shocked and calmed", to reveal the nature of Ada's text, its impacts (on Abel) and the meanings it carries. It is a clause that presents the unpredictability of Lagos' cannibalism. Abel's interpretation of the text highlights words and phrases that usually precede comments on people living in Lagos. This is revealed:

Missing.

Shot.

Found Dead.

On the Run.

Declared Wanted.

Arrested.

Detained. (pp. 10-11)

The highlighted words and clauses are foregrounded to show Lagos's cannibalism. Kan puts them in different lines and uses full-stop to seriously (tone) presents various ways Lagos cannibalizes its dwellers (especially, Lagos Big Boys). In Lagos, people can be "on the run", "found dead", "missing", "shot", "arrested", "detained" or "declared wanted". The city Kan describes in *The Carnivorous City* is a cannibalistic landscape that devours human flesh and dreams. It devours Soni's flesh unannounced and places Abel at the centre of a life threatening metropolitan space.

"*Soni is missing*", repeated at least five times in Kan's novel, is a powerful statement that introduces Abel to Lagos's carnivorousness. It is interchanged with "he is missing" (pp. 12), "Soni was missing, not dead" (pp. 25),

“Sabato is still missing” (pp.25), “my brother is missing” (pp.32) and “he is still missing” (pp. 99) to show Kan’s efforts in cannibalising Lagos and revealing reasons behind Soni disappearance. Like every Big Boy, Soni does shady deals and white-collar crimes to “hit it big in Lagos” (pp. 13).

Soni’s dealings with other Lagos Big Boys like Walata lead to his disappearance and demise. Walata’s (Tiger) words to Abel prove this:

“See, I tell you we have made money. Plenty. But there is one thing I can never forget: everybody must bow to somebody. Pope bow to Jesus, Jesus bow to God, even Devil self, bow to God. But Santo don’t believe in that kind of thing. He used to call himself a self-made man, but I don’t think so. You cannot make yourself. After God has created us somebody will make us. There is a difference between creating and making...I did not kill Sabato, but I did not stop them from removing the ladder...This is Lagos, my brother and good and bad things happen at once”. (pp. 236-237)

Walata’s words, rendered in pidgin and English, explain why Soni is missing. Kan uses saying, “everybody must bow to somebody”, to reveal Lagos Big Boys’ hierarchy and codes. This saying is contrasted by a conjunction (“but”) that shows the reason for Soni’s disappearance. The biblical allusion, “God has created us”, differentiates between “creating” and “making”, and negates Soni’s idea of “self-made man” in a group of white-collar criminals. Walata’s paradoxical statement, “I did not kill Sabato, but I did not stop them from removing the ladder”, confirms Soni’s death and the people responsible for it.

The “ladder” is a symbolic object that represents Soni’s success and height of punishment by Lagos Big Boys who are his creators. In Kan’s *The Carnivorous City*, “Soni is missing” reveals one of the various ways the city cannibalizes. It presents Lagos as a carnivorous landscape that preys on inhabitants through gang members’ clashes. Soni’s disappearance exemplifies “what happens to Lagos Boys”(pp. 32) who often build wealth through shady deals and white-collar crimes.

Aside Soni’s disappearance, Kan reveals Lagos’ carnivorousness through Abel’s activities in the city. Abel and Santos’ (Soni’s PA) visit to Raimi, Soni’s friend, in Mushin portrays cannibal rage and Lagos’s cannibalistic intentions. Kan writes:

Abel and Santos were in Mushin when Lagos bared its fangs. There is no quiet streets in Mushin. It crackles with electric intensity and ripples with animosity...Mushin is a tough land with serious turf wars. Rivals from different gangs and factions — especially of the National Union of Road Transport Workers — prowl the streets at midday with pump-action guns, wild looks and well-smoked joints stuck between fat, black lips. Loud music blares out of speakers... (pp. 35)

In the above passage, Kan uses animal imagery, “Lagos bared its fangs”, to describe Lagos’ carnivorous intentions. Mushin, a suburb of Lagos, is described as a landscape that homes city’s carnivorous agents. “Crackles”, “ripples” and “blares” are sound imagery show Mushin’s inherent dangers and noise pollution. The adjective, “tough”, that qualifies “land” presents Mushin as a difficult landscape and the adverbial phrase “at midday” reveals its carnivorous tendencies in broad daylight.

In Mushin, Lagos’ carnivorous agents move around with instrument of violence like “pump-action guns” to cannibalise at every instance. The city “bared its fangs” during a gangs’ clash when Abel and Santos are in Mushin. The clash between the master and his former apprentice portrays Lagos as a carnivore thirsty for human blood and flesh. The following narrative proves this:

The master lunged at the boy, who ducked and swung the pole in a fine arc. Then there was silence.

The master stood there with a surprised look on his face, his mouth half open, his hand on his stomach. Then Abel saw the red seeping through his fingers. The pole had sliced his belly open. As he staggered back, his intestines escaped his fingers and spilled out of his gut.

The boy tried to run but was tackled to the ground. He screamed as someone stabbed him with the pole, then staggered up and began to run, the pole impaled his side, blood trailing behind him. (pp. 40)

Kan uses “Lunged”, “sliced”, “escaped”, “spilled”, “stabbed”, “tackled” and “screamed” (verbs) to describe city’s violence. “Then there was silence” is an adverbial clause of time that reveals the impact of violence on the master whose “lungs” and “intestines” are

sliced. His death and the chaos that follows further portray cannibal rage in Lagos City. This is revealed:

The street was alive. Men and boys were exiting houses armed with dangerous things. Santos dodged a blow as he crossed the street to the car. Abel's hands were shaking badly but he finally managed to get the key in the key in the ignition and turned on the engine. He engaged a gear and drove off, yelling at Santos to jump in. A rod smashed into their windscreen, which exploded, showering him with shards of glass like hailstones. (pp. 40)

The above narration expresses Lagos's carnivorous nature. Abel and Santos manage to survive Mushin's gangs' fights and attacks. Kan personifies the street ("the street was alive") to reveal its chaotic nature, and uses an adjective "dangerous" to describe the instruments of violence paraded in Mushin. Abel and Santos' experience in Mushin highlight Lagos' appetite for violence, blood and flesh.

In Kan's fiction, Lagos City cannibalizes on a daily basis. People always lost their lives on Lagos' roads for reasons known and unknown. Abel and Santos' journey to Maryland captures this aspect of Lagos' cannibal rage:

By now, car horns were blaring, so a passer-by went to the man in the car upfront to see what the problem was. He staggered back and began to scream...

Santos killed the engine and he and Abel stepped out. The man was slumped over and lying halfway into the front passenger seat, the belt seat holding him up.

Santos poked him, but there was no response and by now a crowd had gathered and people were screaming and speaking all at once. Santos and Abel made it back to the vehicle and managed to manoeuvre the car out of jam. They rode off, past the man dead in his car, swallowed whole by Lagos, like many before him. (pp. 93)

In the above narrative, Lagos' carnivorousness is evidenced. It cannibalizes the man on the road when least expected. The adverbial phrase of time "by now" reveals the vehicular traffic caused by the dead man's vehicle. "Slump over" and "lying halfway" are phrasal verbs that

indicate the dead man's position in his car. Kan uses personification, "swallowed whole by Lagos", to indicate Lagos' appetite for human flesh, and simile ("like many before him") to reveal the large number (of people) it has devoured.

Abel and Santos' experience shows one of the ways the city cannibalizes. People die or have accident when navigating their ways in the city. This is revealed in Abel's journey to Area F:

They stopped at Unity bus stop to let off a female passenger. Two guys transporting metal roofing sheets were passing by as she stepped out of the bus. The edge of the sheet hit her slicing off a piece of her forehead. Blood coursed down her face. The conductor pushed her back in the bus and they sped off to the General Hospital. (pp. 84)

"Passing by" and "stepped out" are used to describe peoples' uncoordinated movements on Lagos' trafficked roads, while "slicing off" (verb phrase) reveals a violent result of commuters' accidental clashes. Kan uses noun phrase "a piece of her forehead" to further reveal Lagos' cannibalism. The lady, like many before her, is a victim of Lagos' unconfined rage.

In Kan's *The Carnivorous City*, Lagos' cannibal rage is also presented through ritual and religious images. Abel, Ada and Auntie Ekwi's (Soni's Aunt) efforts to find Soni portrays ritual and religion as cannibalistic agents in Lagos. In their visit to Brothers' Keepers Foundation Home (a NGO) at Ajegunle to give the needy, Stella Maris (BKFH's owner) tells Abel about ritual violence in Lagos City. This is revealed:

Stella Maris told him that she graduated from the University of Lagos with 2.1 in economics and had been hoping to get a bank job until a story she read about a girl about a girl she knew changed her whole life. The girl had been pregnant, was thrown out of the house and found dead three months later, her breasts and private parts sliced off. (pp. 226)

The verb phrase "sliced off" reveals violence on the girl whose "private parts" are cut for rituals. Her story shows the roles of city's dark-agents (ritualists) in Lagos' cannibalism. Like the gang groups in Mushin, activities of Lagos' dark-agents project Lagos' appetite for flesh. People are kidnapped and sacrificed on "godly demands" in a city that always bared its fangs. In *The Carnivorous City*, ritual and religious totems inform Lagos' thirst for human flesh. Kan's description proves this:

Just before 5am, the Prophet stood at the front of the church and waited for the congregation to file past. A young man was holding a bowl of anointing oil and the Prophet would dip the bowl and slap his open palm on the congregant's forehead...The congregation went round and round until it got to a woman kneeling in prayer at the back. Those around had let her be, but when the crowd thinned an usher went to prod her. The kneeling woman keeled over, she had died on her knees. Everyone ran. (pp. 231)

In the above passage, Lagos' cannibalism is presented from a religious point. Kan uses "anointing oil" as a totemic or animist symbol that reveals religious activities in the city. "Went round and round" portrays the congregation's movements during a spiritual fortification. "Until it got to a woman kneeling..." is an adverbial phrase of time that indicates a change from an organised religious proceeding to a chaotic religious atmosphere which makes "everyone ran" immediately the city cannibalises its victim. Like every victim, Lagos cannibalises the woman. "She had died on her knees" while seeking spiritual solution to her troubles.

The cannibalisation of city in Kan's novel is also evident in how conmen and women exploit city's inhabitants to survive. Abel's encounters with Dr Nichole (Soni's account officer) and Mayowa (a journalist) who both defraud him show how Lagos' Big Girl and Big Boy prey on people to survive. While Dr Nichole uses her office as an accountant to profit from Soni's wealth, Mayowa, a conman, poses like a journalist to defraud Abel.

Kan alternates between "everything is ~~NOT~~ about money" (pp. 182) and Mayowa's statement "everything is not about money" (pp. 188) to show conmen's use of rhetoric to defraud people. "~~Not~~" is foregrounded (cancelled) to negate Mayowa's statement, and to strongly indicate that "everything is about money" in Lagos City. Mayowa belongs to the group of fraudsters ("419 syndrome") who scam people every-day in Lagos' underbelly. He plays on Abel's anxiety to find his missing brother and dupes him two hundred thousand naira.

Abel's encounter with Mayowa presents Lagos as a cannibal that steals and devours. This is revealed in Abel and Santo's violent acts:

Mayowa answered, then uttered a sharp cry as Santos struck him. Abel bounded up the steps, slammed the shut behind

him...Blood stream from Mayowa's nose...

'Where is my money' Abel punched him in the face.

'I don't ha—' Santos kicked him hard in the stomach Mayowa gagged and sank to the floor...directed a well-aimed kick to his head...They gagged Mayowa and tied him to one leg of his table with his belt...

Abel looked from Santos to Mayowa...Anger bubbled to the fore. He lashed out and kicked Mayowa in the gut. Mayowa screamed as bloody snort bubble out of his nose, tears clouding his eyes. (pp. 202-204)

In the above lines, it is evident that Lagos also has a way of cannibalizing fraudsters (conmen and women). Abel and Santos make Lagos "bare its fangs" and swallow Mayowa. "Struck", "punched", "kicked", "gagged" and "tied" "lashed" are verbs that suggest violence. "Cry", "scream", and "clouding" are lexical choices that show Mayowa's pain and eventual death.

Images of cannibal rage in Kan's *The Carnivorous City* is presented in different dimensions. Lagos is portrayed as an animal that has appetite for human flesh and blood. The city is metaphorically compared to a "battlefield" (pp. 50) that destroys, and a "python" (pp. 109) that "swallows" (pp. 176) people without traces. Lagos cannibalises through fights, accident, kidnap, ritual and murder every time it "bared its fangs".

Pornographic Images of Lagos City in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*

Kan presents city's pornographic images in *The Carnivorous City*. Lagos is portrayed as a landscape of sexual feelings and tensions. The city Kan describes is a site of pornography that embodies inhabitants' sexual desires. Kan uses sensual language to describe people's erotic behaviour in Lagos. The city is pictured as a brothel of sex-workers and people who seek pleasure.

In *The Carnivorous City*, Abel and Santo's visit to Matthew Chu's (Soni's business partner) strip joint presents the pornographic images of Lagos City. Mathew's club is one the brothels that give inhabitants sensual pleasure. It mirrors Lagos' pornographic image and shows Lagosians' appetite for sex. Kan's description proves this:

Stuck to the door was a loud sign — NO ENTRY IF YOU ARE NOT OF LEGAL

AGE — but no one was there to check.
(pp. 110)

The adjective, “loud”, that qualifies “sign” reveals the importance of the inscription at the club’s entrance. In Kan’s description, “NO ENTRY...AGE”, is foregrounded (capitalised) to emphasize the importance of the message to anyone visiting the brothel. It is to prevent children and adolescence from entering the prostitution house. However, the subordinate clause, “but no one was to check”, is used to show the club’s inability to execute its warning. Mathew’s brothel symbolises Lagos and its pornography. Kan describes further:

The joint was small and L-shaped. The stage stood in the right-angled crook of the L, allowing patrons on both ends to get a good view. It was a small rectangular space with a raised floor, about two feet off the ground that held Abel’s attention. It had two poles set about two feet apart and two naked girls shimmed on stage, each baring her sex as she slid down. (pp. 110)

In the above passage, the structure of Mathew’s Club is described. The noun phrase, “two naked girls”, projects the pornographic image of Lagos City. They are two of the sex workers employed by Mathew to satisfy his patrons. The club is a house of nudity that presents sexual pictures and stimulates sensual desire in city’s inhabitants. Abel’s experience shows this:

Abel had come expecting to see naked women dancing and grinding, but this was excessive and a tad depressing. He had never seen as many naked women all at once in one place, even if liked naked women, the nude conurbation had the unintended consequence of leaving him unaroused...

He had come expecting nudity but this was a meat shop, a surfeit that left him nauseous. (pp. 111)

The phrase “naked women” is repeated thrice (repetition) to lay emphasis on the pornographic image of Mathew’s club. “Meat shop” (euphemism) and “nude conurbation” are phrases used to describe the “excessiveness” of nudity in Lagos’ strip-club. “Depressing”, “unaroused” and “nauseous” are lexes that reveal Abel’s feelings in a sensual-city. In *The Carnivorous City*, the strip-club is euphemistically portrayed as a “meat shop” to present Lagos as a nude-market where inhabitants assess nudes of different kinds. This is revealed:

A girl in a red top came up to them and asked what they wanted to drink. They ordered stout. She hadn’t even stepped away when two girls with jiggling breasts planted themselves in front of Abel and Santos.

‘Make I dance for you?’ the taller of the two said, planting long fingers painted in different colours on Abel’s crotch.

‘He smiled come back later.’

She did not return the smile as she walked away, wriggling her G-stringed ass. Santos had no qualms and as Abel turned, the other girl was already dancing, rubbing her ample backside against Santos’ distended crotch. (pp. 111)

In the above passage, Lagos’ pornographic image is portrayed. “Two girls with jigglingbreasts” (noun phrase) represents sex-workers that parade Lagos’ streets and clubs. “Breasts”, “crotch”, “backside” and “ass” are sensual dictions Kan uses to paint sexual picture of sex-workers and patrons in the strip-club. The club is a centre of prostitution, pornographic movies and sexual scenes. It presents Lagos as a landscape of nudes and sexual desires.

Kan later compares (simile) the “television screens” showing pornographic movies in Matthew’s strip-club to a “demented bats with flickering eyes” (pp. 112). This reveals the negative impact of sensual atmosphere Mathew creates for patrons in his club. The patrons are people of different age-groups (elders, young boys and girls) who engage in erotic acts and view explicit materials. This is passage reveals this:

The patrons were a mixed bunch. There were elderly men with beer bellies leering at the naked girls and sticking fingers into their dripping wetness. Quite a few of the men seemed bored, as if they would rather be somewhere else.

The professional types and young boys were more eager. Most of the younger boys, those in their twenties, had girls with them and Abel wondered how a man convinces his date to come with him to a strip club. (pp. 112)

Kan uses “a mixed bunch” (noun phrase) to reveal different age-grades that patronise Matthew’s strip-club. “Beer bellies”, “leering”, “naked girls”, “sticking

fingers” and “dripping wetness” are sensual lexis that portray city’s pornographic images. The strip-club is structured to accommodate sex-workers and patrons’ sexual intentions. Kan reveals:

The seats seemed like church pews: straight-backed benches with desks in front. The girls would lie on the desktops, spread their legs wide, place both legs on the patron’s shoulders and sometimes grind themselves to willing face. It was a bit too much for Abel but many of them didn’t seem to mind, nor did the girls, who didn’t show any qualms about having fingers stuck inside them or having their breasts kneaded. (pp. 112)

Kan likens (simile) the club’s “seats” to “church pews” to reveal how its structure accommodates sensual actions. “Lie on”, “spread their legs wide”, “breast” “kneaded”, fingers stuck” and “grind” are lexical choices that paint phonographic picture (image) of Lagos City. The club’s structure and seats enable patrons get into sensual mood before exiting for rooms in the brothel. This is revealed:

A FEE OF N4000 IS CHARGED
FOR
RELAXING WITH A GIRL IN
VIP LOUNGE
RESPECT YOURSELF NO CAMERA
(pp. 111)

Kan foregrounds (capitalised) the above instruction to stress its importance to those seeking pleasure at the porn club. They must pay “N4000” before “RELAXING WITH A GIRL” (euphemism) in the brothel. The club is an embodiment of Lagos’s pornography. This is evident in Matthew’s words:

Oh, your broda doesn’t do that, eh? You didn’t tell him our girls are clean? Sweet, clean pussy,’ Matthew said, more to Abel than Santos.

Abel looked up, smiled and continued reading. (pp. 114)

In the above statement by Matthew portrays Lagos’ pornographic picture. “Do that” and “our girls are clean” are euphemisms that subtly capture sensual motives. They also presuppose the fact that pornography is common in Lagos City (“oh, your broda doesn’t do

that, eh?”). “Sweet, clean pussy” is a sensual utterance (language) that presents Lagos’s sexual image.

Like Matthew’s club, Lagos’ streets reflect city’s pornography in *The Carnivorous City*. This is portrayed in Abel and Santos’ experience:

The roads were free that night, but the streets were active...There were cars parked everywhere and if you wound down and listened you could hear fast-paced music pulsating. It was a Friday and people were actively seeking fun.

Gently swaying men and women hung around in clusters, talking or making out, feverish hands riding up short skirts. Lagos nights could be like that, shrouded under a haze of bacchanalia. Allen was more animated, more in the moment. (pp. 109)

Abel and Santos’ journey from Mobolaji Bank Anthony to Allen roundabout reveals the presence of sex-workers and patrons in Lagos. Kan personalises “streets” (“the streets were active”) to reveal its sensual energy. The phrasal verb “making out” (slang for sexual intercourse) and euphemism, “people were actively seeking fun”, show inhabitants’ sexual desire. Kan uses synecdoche (“hands”) and metonymy (“skirts”) to paint the pornographic images of men and women having “fun” on Lagos’ streets, and “a haze of bacchanalia” (noun phrase) to reveal people’s drunkenness and sensual desires in Lagos’ nights.

In Kan’s fiction, the pornographic image of the city is also captured through Abel and Soni’s sensual actions. Like Lagos’ clubs and streets, Abel and Soni contribute to the city’s pornography. Abel engages in sexual acts with Calista (his ex-girlfriend) and Ada. Abel’s sexual-affair with Calista is the continuation of their previous intimacy at the university. Kan’s description shows this:

She had her bathrobe on when she opened the door and as soon as Abel stepped into the living room, he tugged at the sash and the robe came undone. She was naked underneath. Abel sank to his knees and buried his face between her legs, inhaling her deeply.

‘Have you eaten?’ she asked...

‘This will do for now,’ he said as he lifted her and carried her upstairs. (pp. 120)

Kan uses sensual language to portray Abel and Calista's pornography. "Naked underneath" and "between her legs" are used to picture Calista's sexuality "Tugged at", "sank to his knees", "buried his face" and "inhaling her" are dictions that describe Abel's sensual actions. The demonstrative pronoun "this" (in "this will do for now") is an anaphoric reference to Abel's appetite for sex. Abel and Calista's sexual relationship in *The Carnivorous City* portrays Lagos City and its inhabitants' pornography. This is also revealed in this sensual passage:

They both fell, wet and naked into her bed...

...She inhaled deeply as she took him all in. (pp. 161-162)

In the above, euphemisms, "wet", "naked" and "took him in", show Kan's principal character's (Abel) sexual affairs with Calista epitomise city's pornography. Similar to this is Abel and Ada's relationship that portrays Lagosians' sexual feelings. Ada, after Soni's disappearance, sees Abel as a sexual object and deliberately creates orgasmic tensions between them. This is evident below:

When Ada took the dishes out, Abel undressed and got in the shower.

He worked out naked to find Ada sitting there, leafing through a magazine.

'Wow, cover yourself,' she told him without lowering her gaze. 'That's almost 3 inches,' she laughed (pp. 142)

"Undressed", "worked out naked" and "3 inches" are lexical choices used to picture Abel's sexual image. Ada's statement, "cover yourself", and her refusal to take eyes off Abel's nakedness ("without lowering her gaze") is a major pornographic scene in *The Carnivorous City*. She is a patron who tries everything in her arsenal to assess Abel's sexuality. Abel and Ada's sensual scene proves this:

He pushed her back on her bed and took one hard, dark nipple in his mouth. Ada cried out as if in pain...He covered her body with kisses, from her face neck down to her belly...when he pulled down her dress, he was surprised to see that she wore no panties. (pp.238)

In the above passage, Kan's use sensual language captures Abel and Ada's pornography. "Dark nipple", "body" and "no panties" describe the image of Ada's sexuality, while "pulled down" and "covered" are used to describe Abel's actions on Ada in a pornographic city. This is evident in the lines below:

He kissed between her legs, tongue flicking over pubis, lips over labia, tasting her and teasing out moans as she pulled her dress over her head and flung it across the room. She reached out and pulled off his boxer.

They didn't fall asleep afterwards. They just talked, her fingers tracing the welts on his back where she had dug in and drawn blood as she climaxed not once, not twice, but thrice. (pp. 238)

"Kissed between her legs", "tongue flicking over pubis", "lips over labia", and "tasting her" and "teasing out moans" are erotic lexes that describe Ada's femininity and Abel's eroticism. Kan uses "climaxed", a phonographic term, to reveal Ada's sexual satisfaction and orgasm. In *The Carnivorous City*, Abel, Calista and Ada's sensual engagements portray city's pornographic image and Lagosians' sexual urge.

Like them, Soni is popularly called "9inches" (pp. 141) for his sexual exploits in Lagos City. "9inches" (unit) is a euphemistic word used to describe Soni's sexuality (male organ) and sensual life. The pornographic image of the city in Kan's *The Carnivorous City* is presented through Matthew's club and characters' sensual actions in the city. The brothel symbolizes Lagos as a sexual landscape and portrays inhabitants' amoral life. Kan's characters (Abel, Calista, Ada and Soni) are "image-makers" whose sexualities construct Lagos' pornographic image.

CONCLUSION

The African city is the focus of African city literature. Kan, in *The Carnivorous City*, makes city his subject matter, using language and literary devices that portray images of Lagos' cannibalism and pornography. The city Kan describes is a violent and pornographic landscape that always devours Lagosians and also appeals to their pornographic appetite. This study, employing the principles of New Criticism, reveals Kan's fiction describes the city of Lagos as a cannibalistic landscape using literary language, devices, animal imagery and symbolism. Lagos City's cannibalistic tendencies are foregrounded in speeches, images, incidents and spectacles that point at death, violence, accident, kidnapping, religious rites and ritual occurrences that always claim human life in the city. Reading *The Carnivorous City* as an autonomous work of art also explicates city's pornography. The city of Lagos is pictured as a pornographic landscape in the text. Intrinsic features among them; literary images, symbols

and sensual dictions are employed to render Lagosians' sexual exploits and sensual feelings on the textual page. Lagos as the universal subject in African literature of the urban-space is presented as a den that devours humans and pictured as a "sexual hub" in Kan's novel. The study, thus, recommends a New Criticism of African city literature, as this approach clearly enriches the artfulness of the sub-genre and sharpens the meaning of Afro-urban literary texts beyond what extrinsic reading offers.

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