

# **"I DON'T SEND ANYBODY": SLANG, LANGUAGE CHOICE, AND RESISTANCE IN SELECT NIGERIAN NOVELS**

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## **Abstract**

Slang is among the linguistic strategies Nigerian novelists employ in their narratives. However, studies on the use of language in the Nigerian novel are yet to pay critical attention to the multi-discursive functions of slang expressions. This neglect is mostly steeped in the canonical supposition that slang is an impolite linguistic expression; invariably proposing that slang is unworthy of scholarly investigation. Such a supposition undermines the creative and discursive function to which slang as a language variety is utilised in the Nigerian novel. To fill this research gap and, using three selected Nigerian novels: *Waiting for an Angel*, *Arrows of Rain*, and *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*, this paper investigates the use of slang in order to illustrate that slang is a linguistic device that youths create and deploy to negotiate and construct resistance identity. Drawing significantly from Manuel Castells' identity theory which accounts for how language is deployed to construct resistance identity, the analytical method involves textual and extra-linguistic analysis. Such an analytical methodology offers insights into the intricate bond between language and identity construction in literary situations.

**Keywords:** Slang, Resistance, Nigerian novel, Castells, Identity, Nigerian Pidgin Expression

## **Introduction**

Nigerian novelists employ diverse linguistic strategies in their narratives so as to capture the wide-ranging dimensions of their literary engagement. Given the various linguistic strategies deployed by the Nigerian novelists in their writing vocation, the Nigerian novel has enjoyed a gamut of scholarly interpretations from the linguistic flank. However, slang, being one of the many linguistic strategies Nigerian novelists engage in presenting Nigeria's social experience in a picturesque manner, is yet to interest many a linguistic critic of the Nigerian novel. While this neglect tends to undermine the discursive functions of slang in a multilingual community like Nigeria, especially as a creative linguistic tool which language users rely upon to indicate resentment to actions and activities of others—actions that either lean towards being inimical or hostile to the slang users' existence, the neglect seems to be mostly steeped in the canonical



conjecture that slang is an informal language for impolite discourse. If slang is taken as an inappropriate language facility, it devalues the meta-discursive significations that are embedded in the deployment of slang in interactive or conversational situations, as this paper seeks to explain.

Despite some linguists', even non-linguists' negative perception of slang, it is a core element of social group mobilisation and a defiant gesture of resistance. It is an emblem of group identity. Other manifestations of a generation's identity are the clothes they prefer (fashion), the hair-do that makes them *belong*, the tunes they *rock* to (music/dance), among others, but these can be easily regulated by authorities. In some Nigerian universities, for instance, authorities have prohibited dress style that exposes *sensitive* body parts. But language can hardly be regulated and restricted. It is in the light of this that Costica Bradatan avers, If the system's power comes from its ability to affect people's minds through language, resistance should come from language as well (Bradatan 2). This tells us that even the most watchful attempts by authorities cannot completely eradicate slang and its use within speech communities. Although language can be scrutinised and controlled in some places at some times, it can challenge universal regulation, allowing its revolutionary nature to prevail (Bradatan 3). Bradatan's argument stems from the belief that language can change the real world; its capacity to change the ways identities are formulated and reformulated is enormous. This is very true of the use of slang. The figure below is an illustration of the idea that where language is used to exert control, there is also resistance, and various varieties of language can be activated for the purpose of resistance in a network of interpersonal relationships.

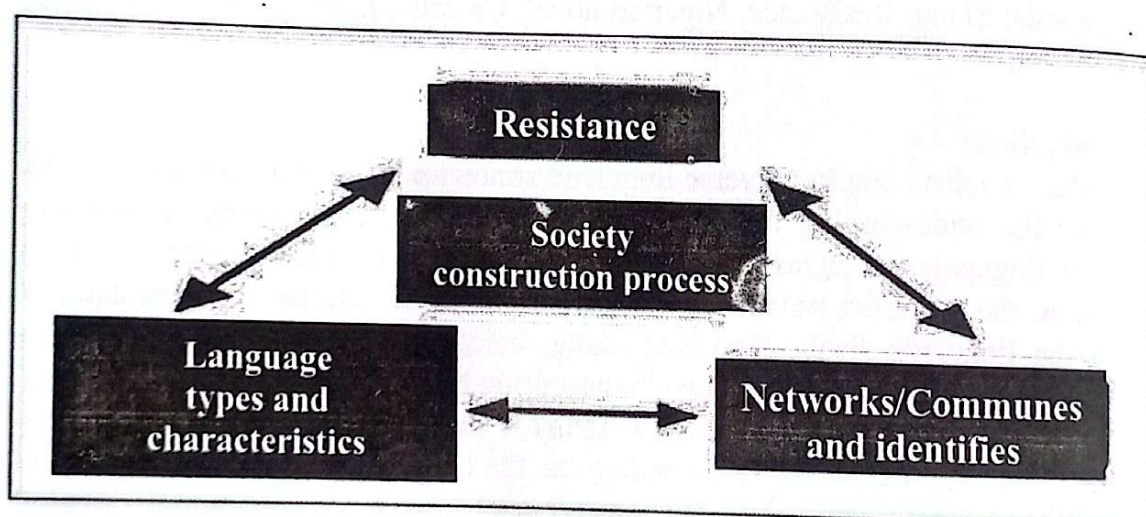


Figure 1: Language and resistance



Examining resistance through language with this model enables an understanding of how language is a constitutive part of struggle. Identity is, then, a matter of self-concept, of construction rather than of social categories, of what people think of others. As Figure 1 above indicates, resistance is the most powerful stimulus for the creation and distribution of slang. What this means is that people use slang as a form of identity, group solidarity, and as a linguistic tool of resistance, as this article demonstrates. Although it is not every member of a group that is oppressed by a dominant pattern of life, people are naturally influenced by situational imperatives to invent a slang term which they consider theirs, resisting the linguistic as well as social behaviour of non-members of their group or those who stand in opposition to the expression of their desires. Bradatan, cited above, argues that "[y]our language is not just something you use, but an essential part of what you are" (4). Language, then, is a site of cultural struggle. It is a "safe haven in a refuge of smoldering emotions" (Fanon, cited in Flores-Rodríguez 28). In a similar way, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus points to those aspects of people's life that index the way they use language. Habitus describes the socially acquired proclivities which are performed in many ways and contexts of talking and writing. Thinking in a parallel direction with Bourdieu, language has been described as "a functional code for expressing valued feelings, attitudes and loyalties" (Oni and Oke 145).

Oppression, then, is one major factor which provides an impetus to coin and use slang for resistance reason. Aboh also argues that "slang is an 'alternative' language whose use points to people's willingness to be free; to use words or expressions that describe them and their daily existence in a meaningful and apt manner" (*Slang and Multiple Methods* 92). This is the focus of this essay. Using Abimbola Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* (hereafter *Rusted Roofs*), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (henceforth *Angel*), and Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (hereafter *Arrows*), as representative Nigerian texts, this article provides insights into the ways the selected Nigerian novelists deploy slang as a linguistic device of resistance identity construction. Although there are other linguistic choices that illuminate the nexus between language and the expression of resistance in the select novels, our focus is on what we conceptualise as slang for the reasons we have advanced above. Our belief is that looking at slang within the magnified context of discursive enactment of resistance offers an ideal means for investigating this linguistic modality.

### Previous Studies

Despite disconcerting views of slang, it is one language variety that has enjoyed critical engagement by scholars in the field of variationist linguistics and discourse studies. E. Martiello, cited in Modupe Alimi and Arua Arua, conceptualises slang by drawing on two broad categories: the general and the



specific. The general slang terms, according to Martillo, are used deliberately by speakers to break with the standard usage, and therefore are not group-restricted, and specific slang terms are used by people of common age and experience (15). Specific slang, then, functions as in-group markers. Corroborating Martiello's argument, Mads Holmsgaard Eriksen writes, "slang is not confined to particular groups of people, but [...] it rather can be used by anyone who wants to convey an attitude that the use of standard language word cannot convey" (22). Eriksen's position implies that the use of slang and its popularity with social groups should not come as a surprise. Slang, by its nature of existence, is wittier and cleverer than Standard English. As a variety of language that is naturally inclined to linguistic creativity, slang is quite engaging because of its infinite resourcefulness. With slang, each speech community or group has the chance to shape and propagate its own lexicon, and in so doing exercises originality and imaginative ingenuity. The end result is always a lively, playful body of language that is at times used for no other reasons than that it expresses the users' feeling and perception in an apt manner.

It then implies that slang "can be studied from one group to another denoting the membership of a social group" (Ijaiya 125). Because group identity is eminently important, slang functions as a powerful and explicit means of expressing groups' consciousness. Slang is an emblem of a community of practice. A community of practice, according to Brian Paltridge, "is a group of people who come together to carry out certain activities with each other" (77). Since people come together to carry out certain activities together, they naturally evolve a language variety that gives expression to those activities. Slang is the easiest and simplest language variety that can evolve in a community of practice to cater for the communicative needs of the community. In a corollary, it is within a community of practice that the meaning of a slang expression is much more understood.

Also, Alimi and Arua discuss slang from the social-function perspective as "the informal and highly expressive products of students' creativity which are used to describe their cultural, academic or social lives" (39). Their definition is not without some shortcomings. Besides the fact that the University is not one closeted community, some slang expressions are borrowed into the University by students owing to their interaction with speech communities outside the University community. Neither are slang's creativity and usage restricted to college students nor confined to the hallowed walls of universities. Rather, it is a part of everybody's everyday life.

For Akmajian et al, slang "is a set of expressions that is characteristic of informal language style, tends to change rapidly, and often serves to indicate solidarity within a given social group" (588). Adopting this definition and also considering the polemic function to which slang can be put will provide insights



into how slang is an important communication code which people, regardless of their age, education, profession, among others, use to resist perceived domination. Given the flexibility and creative potential of slang "as a variety of language" (Odebunmi 47), it establishes a sense of commonality among its users. The implication is that when slang is used, there is a subtext to the primary message. That subtext speaks deeply to the speakers and listeners who belong to the same community of practice. The meaning of slang, therefore, may not necessarily be realised in the slang term itself, but in its very use in specific discourse contexts. This kind of reasoning derives from the argument that "[t]he primary message," as Aboh insists, "is not in the meaning of what is said but in the very use of the slang – a compelling example of how the medium can be the message" (*Slang as Repository* 521). If Aboh's summation is stretched a little further, it would occur to us that there is a subtext to every linguistic expression, and that silent signification can only be understood when the expression is placed within its situationalised context.

### Theoretical Framework

Our understanding of identity derives from the idea that identity is socially constructed from a "network" of cultural and historical meanings. In his book, *The Power of Identity*, Manuel Castells uses the term, the "network society" as the main concept and focus of his theoretical postulation. While we do not see a marked departure from the tenets of social identity theory, Castells' notion of network further deepens our understanding of how identity is neither fixed nor essentially pregiven. Castells defines "network" as a set of interconnected nodes and argues that the prospect of change and domination indicates how people's search for meaningfulness can trigger various forms of identity construction. For Castells, identity

[is] the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role-sets. Roles [...] are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society (6-7).

Although, as Castells argues, identities can originate from dominant institutions, they eminently "become identities only when and if social actors internalize



them, and construct their meaning around this internalization" (7). Following the processes of social adoption and interaction, identities transform into stronger sources of meaning than the roles people play in community of practice because of "the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve" (7).

Given that for Castells the information age is characterised by a dominance of social structure over the human agent, it is particularly appropriate to draw attention to the fact that the social and the system colonising the life-world are being updated to the era of global information. Castells' vision of the social agency, as an analytic counterpart for the social structure in the age of information can be expressed with the words *identity*, *identity policy* and *new social movements*. The new social movement primacy is given to a different kind of category of social agency—identity and identity-based movements. Identification as such, is, of course, a historical and a universal socio-psychological phenomenon but rises to the centre of social change and change-making. This, argues Castells, is the true meaning of the primacy of identity politics in the network society. The search for meaningfulness, according to Castells, triggers specific kinds of identity-formation processes:

- Legitimizing identity: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination vis à vis social actors, a theme that is at the heart of Sennett's theory of authority and domination, but also fits with various theories of nationalism.
- Resistance identity: generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society, as Calhoun proposes when explaining the emergence of identity politics.
- Project identity: when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure. This is the case, for instance, when feminism moves out of the trenches of resistance of women's identity and women's rights, to challenge patriarchalism, thus the patriarchal family, and thus the entire structure of production, reproduction, sexuality, and personality on which societies have been historically based (8).

For Tayo Lamidi and Romanus Aboh, "[l]egitimising identity is a strategy employed by the dominant identity to sustain its hegemony over the dominated" (38). Lamidi and Aboh further state that in Castells' views, there are people who struggle for, and use, the power of the state for various goals, both democratic



and progressive, and identify themselves as agents of civil society. This category of identity supports the institution with the legitimisation that it requires. It is often integrated into social institutions as a way of maintaining a status quo.

Resistance identity is a device employed by the minority to question the dominance of legitimising identity. This level of identity-formation has the imprints of grassroots at the level of collective identity formation that does not mobilise itself within the civil society, but is materialised as community-building. These communes bring together the excluded, the stigmatised and the anguished to gain a collective experience that gathering around a common meaning can offer. What is characteristic to the commune-building is resistance against the surrounding society and against other communes. "This gives it the name resistance identity" (Lamidi and Aboh 38). This kind of identity construction is the core for the formation of social identities. Resistance identity seems to be the most influential identity category of the present age because societies would not stop and stay in their fragmentation. The #Endsars protest, which took place in October 2020, in Nigeria draws attention to the ways the dominated deploy the mechanism of language to resist the dominant identity. What this means is that the dominated group may encounter difficulties in negating the symbolic power of the dominant group, but they can symbolically resist the power by adopting linguistic practices which oppose the hegemonic disposition of the dominant group as well as articulate the innate desire to be free. Implicitly, through active engagement and creative use of language, groups do express their dissonance with hegemonic norms. Resistance is therefore hidden somewhere in-between the seams of dominance.

Project identity "is a step further in terms of resistance identity, as it involves evolving from the passivity of resistance to action which calls for a change in social dominance" (Aboh *Lexical Borrowing* 58). This kind of identity construction emanates as a result of the communes' (resistance identity) reconstruction of legitimising identity. Aboh goes on to clarify that "project identity is the consequence of resistant/defensive identity" (*Lexical Borrowing* 58). Castells holds the view that these will be the identity construction of the future. Thus, by applying Castells' postulations to the study of the language of resistance in the Nigerian novel, we are implying that the Nigerian novel is a cultural cite that accounts for how fictionalised characters strategically deploy linguistic resources to register their displeasure or resist establishments that oppress them. At another level, we are placing the Nigerian novel against the productive tension that backgrounds its linguistic materialisation of ideas.



### Data Presentation and Analysis

Slang terms, as can be seen from the selected novels, are used to represent discourse participants' points of view and their creative ways of responding to the world around them. Mainly, the slang items operate as linguistic tools which literary characters explore in expressing their resentment with the activities of dominant groups, groups whose actions either conduce into or tend towards oppressing/suppressing the slang users' views or ways of life. Broadly, these slang terms originate from education, journalism, military dictatorship and Nigerian Pidgin expressions. Significantly, the slang terms are explications of the oppressed evolution of a language variety which enables them to not just exchange ideas within communes, but to also "essentialize the boundaries of resistance" (Castells 9). These slang expressions are summarised in the table below.

**Table 1: slang terms and their meaning equivalent**

Slang	Meaning equivalent	Linguistic feature	Source	Novel
Pure water	Spirit sold in sachet	Neology	Nigerian Pidgin English	<i>Angel</i>
Weed	Marijuana	semantic shift		<i>Angel</i>
Bust the lecture	to forego a lecture	Neology	youth language	<i>Angel</i>
Press boys	Journalists	Compounding	journalism	<i>Arrows</i>
Decree	oppression/predilection for oppression	semantic shift/expansion	military dictatorship	<i>Arrows</i>
Ole	Thief	lexical borrowing	Yoruba	<i>Angel</i>
Government boy-boy	government's stooge	Relexicalization	Nigerian Pidgin English	<i>Angel</i>
I don't send anybody	I do not fear anybody	Neology	youth language	<i>Rusted Roofs</i>

Having summarised the slang terms in the above table, we undertake a textual analysis of the slang found in the texts selected for this study. In *Waiting for an Angel*, for example, the expression *pure water* is a slang term for alcohol (spirit) with a metaphoric signification. Nancy tells Kela:



'She makes enough from the restaurant. More than enough, but she spends most of it on drink. She calls it "pure water," Nancy said grudgingly, as if I was forcing the words out of her mouth. She was that way: she hated to dwell on anything that threw a bad light on my auntie. Nancy feared no one, respected no one; she was self-destructively belligerent.... (*Waiting for an Angel*, p. 108)

Before the function of the slang term is discussed, it is expedient to note that *pure water* is a Nigerian Pidgin English expression that describes sachet water. In the context of the novel, however, the slang term has not only been semantically shifted, but also relexicalised to bring out the intended meaning of the user. Nancy explains to Kela that his auntie, Auntie Rachael, makes a lot of money from her restaurant, but she spends most of the money on *pure water*. In the above example, Nancy's attitude distances her from Auntie Rachael. She says "she calls it pure water," meaning that it is what Auntie Rachael calls it but not her, Nancy. The syntactic inclusion of the agent *she* creates a discourse of the antagonistic *other*. The indirect reference to the agent expresses Nancy's identity construction in *resistance* to those who spend their earnings on *pure water*. Two things are noteworthy of explication up to this point. First, Nancy uses the slang term to "dismember" herself from Auntie Rachael's group who spend their earnings on *pure water*. Second, she uses the slang to sensitise Kela to Auntie Rachael's spending as well as her alcoholic habit. The expression achieves Nancy's aim as she persuades Kela to see the reason Auntie Rachael has to give up her *pure water*. More importantly, Nancy's resistance to Auntie Rachael's alcoholic behaviour her choice of the distal deictic expression "she". The deliberate pronominal choice maps a boundary between herself and those who "waste" their hard-earned money on alcohol.

In the same novel, *Angel*, Kela, Helon Habila's child narrator uses *weed*, slang expression for marijuana, to describe his father's outdatedness. He reports:

'I caught him smoking weed, in my car. Weed, at his age. He failed his exams, now he is smoking weed!' I wondered in a detached, clinical way why my father kept referring to it as 'weed'. It sounded so old-fashioned. My friend had over ten names for it, all so new, so creative. (*Waiting for an Angel*, p.109)

Again, one sees how slang functions as a *commune's* communication code, aimed at excluding non-members or non-initiates of a group. While Kela's father uses *weed*, an old and familiar name for marijuana that most know, Kela with his younger generation of friends has several "creative" ways of referring to *weed*.



Aboh (*Slang as Repository* 518) notes that some slang function as euphemisms, and that euphemisms have huge capacity to conceal the truth and also reduce the effect of an expression. While Kela's father is being euphemistic in his choice of words, Kela thinks his father is not creative, not socially up to date in his linguistic construction of ideas. Whatever Kela and his friends call *weed*, it embodies his group's dissonance with the *other's* use of language. And thus, it is more or less the reason different groups at different times and periods have constructed their own slang as language variety only members of the ingroup can identify with or be identified with. Kela's amazement at his father's inability to create names for marijuana is an act of resistance: indicating the differences that exist between two distinct groups. It is a rejection of the old *other*. Kela rebuffs his father's generation's inability to create newer names for existing things, and so he *projects* that idea that linguistic creativity and fluidity are common with his own *commune*. Invariably, Kela's resistance to the use of *weed* expresses his affiliation with his generation, and disaffiliation with the *other* (his father's) group whose linguistic repertoire is insufficient in naming things. In the end, Kela succeeds in projecting the linguistic identity of his group who has *over ten names for weed*.

Also, there is the use of *bust the lecture* to express resistance to perceived domination in the conversation between Lomba and Alice:

'Sorry. But you don't need me anymore. You can see the building from here'. He pointed. 'Just go through that door and ask for the cash clerk'.

'But the lecturer said you have to take us there,' Jeans began.

'I heard what the lecturer said, but I have a lecture to catch. Bye.'

'Bust the lecture.' (*Waiting for an Angel* 65)

Alice tells Lomba to *bust the lecture*. To *bust a lecture* means to deliberately forgo a lecture. In the context of the novel, Lomba tells Alice that he cannot take her round the campus as Dr Kazeem would have him do because he has a lecture to attend. But Alice asks him to *bust the lecture*. The slang term as used by Alice performs two discursive functions: polemic and empathy-establishing tactic. In terms of polemics, the slang term is Alice's forceful rejection of Lomba's position. On the other hand, it is aimed at making Lomba see the need why he has to forgo his lecture. Though the slang projects Alice as an unserious student, as Lomba later reveals, the expression shows that slang is, as it is with students of other cultures, a part and parcel of Nigerian university students' communicative behaviour. *Bust the lecture* shows a correlation between what the slang connotes and the actual theme or aspect of the students' lives on campus, their *commune*. *Bust the lecture*, a linguistic feature of semantic shift characteristic of most slang expressions, works effectively as an in-group communicative code which is



meaningful to Alice and Lomba because they share the same social identity as students of the same university. Alice's deployment of the slang is intended to let Lomba see that lectures at the university level are not compulsory. The subtext of Alice's locution is her demonstration of the desire to live her life the way it pleases. Thus, *burst the lecture* as a slang term expresses a desire for freedom, but most significantly, it communicates her resistance to establishments that want to stifle her emotions. This kind of resistance, in Castells' views, will conduce into *project* identity.

Resistance to perceived dominance is also seen in Rafiu's use of *I don't send anybody*. He angrily tells his father:

"Look, Alhaji," he said, rising up to his father, "you don't want me to look you in your eyes?"

"You will abuse me?"

"I can! I don't send anybody!" So saying, he pushed Alhaji aside and left the house. He didn't come back home for another two days. (*Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*, 92)

*I Don't send anybody* roughly translates as "not to have regard for anyone, irrespective of the person's age or status." The slang is basically used by the younger generation of Nigerians to show disagreements with other people's opinions. However, in *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*, Rafiu uses the slang to imply that he does not care what neither his father nor his uncle, Lamidi, thinks about his being a political thug. When he uses the expression with his friends, they understand because, like in the use of *bust the lecture* in the preceding example, *I don't send anybody* functions as an ingroup communicative code. Importantly, the slang exposes Rafiu's conscientious effort targeted at dislodging himself from the control of his family, the *legitimizing* identity. More importantly, the semantic value of the slangy expression is something one will only know if one is an insider to the use of this unusual expression.

Similarly, in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, slang functions as a sociolect: a linguistic creation that meets the communicative needs of a social group. When Ogugua attends one of Reuben's weekend parties, Reuben introduces him to his fellow ministers, one of them calls Ogugua a rat:

The other ministers murmured and grumbled that they did not want press boys at their parties. (*Arrows of Rain* 113)

*Press boys*, as used in this context, has a derogatory discourse-semantic value. The use of *press boys* reiterates an earlier position that slang mirrors social conflict. The ministers are angry that Ogugua, who is a journalist, has written an article about a minister's corrupt actions. So, the use of *press boys* creates a



confrontational discourse, a battle ground of *we* against *them*. It is a strategic legitimization of the ministers' ideological value and a demonstration of resistance aimed at disregarding as well as linguistically disvaluing the identity of journalists. The ministers' pragmatic sub-act of insulting has a perlocutionary effect on Ogugua, as he reacts to their vituperation. Symbolically, the slang term functions meta-pragmatically in capturing the ideological divide that holds between politicians and journalists. In activating the slang term, the ministers create distance to the antagonistic *other* (the journalist) and establish the membership of their ingroup (the political group). *Press boys*, therefore, functions as an antagonistic discourse move activated by the ministers to resist the proliferation of their group. In resisting Ogugua, the ministers strive to legitimise the superiority of their in-group over that of the out-group, the press boys.

Moreover, in Abimbola Adelokun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*, a *decree* which generally refers to military laws has been recontextualised to refer to the antagonistic-dominant identity, the military that oppress ordinary Nigerians:

"Both of you had better shut up your mouths." *Iyawo* said.  
 "Can't you see that WAI man going? You want a decree to carry you?" (119)

By and large, the expression captures the people's dissonance with military laws that made them prisoners in their own country. The term, *decree*, is re-lexicalised to go beyond a term for military laws to capture policies and programmes that dehumanised Nigerians. This discursive strategy draws attention to the neatly edgy relationship between the *legitimizing* identity and the *resistance* identity. A *decree* in the context of the novel not only refer to military laws, but to a set of people who use the instrument of power to inflict hardship on the Nigerian people— *that WAI man*. The choice of the distal marker, *that*, speaks clearly of the people's aversion for the military and its draconic laws. The situation was awfully dehumanising such that even children were restrained from playing. Martins Meredith recounts that during military rule, "Nigeria descended into violence, disorder and repression" (397). Spreading from the top, arrogance and impunity became embedded in the Nigerian military. Critically, the slang narrates the people's resistance to situations that were inimical to their existence. The slang term has a resistance undercurrent as it indicates that a *decree* has a sinister connotation. *Decree* is given a human figure, thereby making the condemnation of military hegemonic dominance more visible and resentful.

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) has been described as a language that combines English expressions with indigenous languages to form its vocabulary. It has been used by Nigerian writers as a linguistic resource to provide their



works with a Nigerian colouration. This linguistic modality enables Nigerian writers to illuminate the symbolic parallel between the use of NPE and the formulation of a Nigerian identity (Aboh *Language and the Construction* 94-95). Beyond the use of NPE in the formulation of a Nigerian identity, it is also used as a linguistic means of resistance, of expurgating perceived dominance or hegemony.

In Ndibe's *Arrows*, NPE usage is exhibited in above regard. In the context of the novel, Violet, a commercial sex worker, uses NP to reject being described as a rude person. Ogugua reports:

In the background I heard somebody cursing. 'Na your mama be quite rude! Na you be rude, you hear!' I recognised Violet's voice (*Arrows* 181).

(It is your mother who is quite rude. You are the rude one).

When Violet goes to tell Ogugua about Emilia's death, a quarrel ensues between a receptionist and her. The receptionist tells Ogugua that his visitor, Violet, is rude but Violet resists being identified as a discourteous person. Her linguistic tactic is discursively resistant: her rejection of being described as a rude person resonates with a determined effort to reconstruct a positive identity for herself in spite of the receptionist's perception. Violet does not end her identity reformulation goal, better still "acts of identity" at reconstructing an acceptable identity for herself, but goes a step further to tell the receptionist that it is her mother who is rude. In the Nigerian sociolinguistic-scape, it is abominable to insult a person's mother. Violet is conscious of this sociocultural matrix and deliberately deploys it not only to get back at the receptionist, but also to counterattack the receptionist's libelous linguistic behaviour. What we see in this context is how Violet in "a willful, active way undoes the identity" (John 75) formulated for her by the receptionist.

We also, in Habila's *Angel*, see NPE as a language of protest:

'Thieves!'

'Ole!'

'Give them their brother, government boy-boy' (*Arrows*, P. 57).

(You thieves (*Ole* is a Yoruba word for a thief.)

Hand them their brother. You government stooges.)

*Ole* is a Yoruba word that translates to thief/thieves. In the height of military dictatorship in Nigeria, Bola is seen calling for the ousting of the military junta at a transportation parking lot. And when security agents want to take him away by force (a practice that emplaced itself significantly in the apparatus of military dehumanisation of indigent Nigerians), the crowd shouts at the security agents to



hand Bola over to his friend, Lomba and Bola's cousins, Peter and Paul, whose madness is caused by the death of one his sisters who was killed by a military truck at Ibadan. When the security agents insist on taking Bola with them, the crowd reacts by throwing stones at the security men, calling them *ole* (thieves) and impetuous government's stooges. The NPE expressions in conjunction with the Yoruba word function as slang expressions which the protesting crowd activates to articulate their angst at an oppressive system that subjugates them and tempers with their freedom of expression. This linguistic materialisation can be read as "principled resistance" (Benwell and Stokoe 77) the crowd invents to reformulate the identity of the security agents (that is the security agents are rather seen by the crowd as killers). To intensify the magnitude of their quest to break free from military dictatorship, the crowd complements its booing with throwing stones at the security agents. Thus, in resistance to the legitimising identity, the military junta, the oppressed group resort to weaponising language. Their careful linguistic expression fires their struggle for a better Nigeria, free of humiliation and intimidation.

### Conclusion

The study of slang indicates that while the majority of the slang terms are "conventional" English words whose meanings are semantically extended/shifted to cater for the communicative needs of speech communities/*communes*, others are formed/derived from Nigerian Pidgin English expressions. These pidginised slang expressions speak to members of a *commune* in an acute manner, presupposing a tacit agreement among users in their community of practice. The implication is that the pidginised forms may not be accessible to non-members of a speech community. This act of linguistic "dismembering" is an ultimate reason for the social construction of slang in the first instance.

It can, therefore, be argued that the slang terms function as discourse strategies which discourse participants work upon to resist people and situations they consider inimical to their existence, on the one hand and a discursive act of articulating a desire to do things the way one wants, on the other. This unveils the dynamic ways in which slang can be calibrated for the expression of dissent and the polemic contestation of identities. Slang is a concept that has social implications for the speaker and the listener. This goes a long way to counter the belief in certain linguistic quarters that slang is an impolite language used mainly by deviants. The investigation of slang words, as evident in the sampled Nigerian novels, shows that slang expressions differ considerably from standard language since there are obvious social, non-formal intentions of using slang. The use of slang in the Nigerian novel draws attention to the myriad of linguistic strategies Nigerian novelists rely upon in capturing the multi-faceted themes of their literary engagement.



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