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To all the mothers and the aunties, past, present, and future.

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Preface

When I dream of my mom, we're almost always in her store. Sometimes we're together; more often, I'm anxiously watching the glass door while she runs an errand, eagerly awaiting her return before a customer walks in. In my dreams, her store, Batik Arts, becomes a mix of my own childhood memories and details from one of my favorite photos of her. In the photo, she is standing behind a cluttered glass showcase with a *Forbes* magazine, a card reader, and a small rack holding necklaces and bracelets. On the shelves next to her stands a colorful display of bags: Some are knockoff designer brands while others are handmade African designs. My mom looks young and optimistic, a curator and saleswoman confidently wearing a hot pink, purple, and turquoise shirt tucked into white shorts. Her lips are slightly parted like she's in the middle of talking, which she almost always was.

Batik Arts, which my younger brother and I just called "The Store," was my earliest lesson in diasporic homemaking—the practice of settling and dwelling critical to diasporic community formation—that is at the heart of this book. My parents opened the storefront at 816 East Broadway in 1989, when I was about one year old. While I usually say I was born and raised in Columbia, Missouri, it would be more accurate to say I was born and raised in Batik Arts. According to my mom, she was the one who taught my dad how to batik. Remixing the traditional tie-die and *adire* textile dyeing methods she had learned as a young artist in her hometown of Abeokuta, Nigeria, my mom and dad collaborated to create one-of-a-kind wearable art on Fruit of the Loom T-shirts purchased from the local Walmart. After just over a year selling their designs at craft festivals and consignment shops throughout mid-Missouri, they decided to take the leap and open a store of their own. They were two young artists and recent graduates struggling to find employment, and Batik Arts offered the

possibility of financial stability. Using a mix of immersion and direct application methods, their designs reflected the bold color combinations of the 1980s and 1990s and featured eye-catching geometric shapes and zigzags. They were all finished with the same looping signature: "Akinbola."

As the store steadily grew, it eventually relocated to a larger location at 1025 East Walnut, which consisted of a storefront, an office space, and a large studio in the back where my dad ran a nonprofit called Arts for Income—an initiative focused on helping artists gain the skills to earn a living from their art—and it drew all sorts of people to the store. Like the artists showcased in this book, my father was also committed to exploring the relationship between artmaking and reimagining one's life and future. Around this time, my mom began carrying everything—from jewelry made in Central America, South America, and Asia to sculptures and fabrics from all over Africa. The walls were covered with Fang Ngil masks from Gabon, Luba masks from Congo, and mud cloth from Mali. She would purchase many of these goods from her merchant, Bunja, who would visit the store a few times a year, pulling up to the curb in his banged-up white van where they would haggle for hours.

My mom's obituary reads, "Batik Arts was a pillar in downtown Columbia, Missouri for 15 years. The store, which was also briefly a cafe, attracted people from all backgrounds, from bikers to southern hippies, with whom Mrs. Akinbola seamlessly cultivated vibrant friendships." Indeed, the combination of one-of-a-kind wearable art and textiles, jewelry, sculptures from all over the world, and my mom's warm welcome to all who entered set Batik Arts apart from anywhere else in Columbia. The Store primarily attracted three groups of people: (1) counterculture Missourians with a global awareness, (2) people wanting to be somewhere that reminded them of home, and (3) people who wanted to be near other people who didn't quite fit in anywhere else.

If you stopped by my mom's store on any given afternoon, you would find her sitting in a (technically for sale) intricately carved wooden chair, likely eating lunch (Hunan chicken with extra rice) from the Chinese restaurant up the street, or drinking a Coke and chewing Double Bubble. Sometimes her soap operas would be playing on the small staticky TV sitting in the corner. She would make conversation with anyone. She had the gift of gab in a way that could be initially surprising before becoming overwhelming, and then somewhat comforting and amusing. Over the course of her days, she was visited by friends who were sometimes customers and customers who turned into friends.

Though there were many Nigerian uncles and aunties we saw outside of the store—for Nigerian Independence Day, baby christenings, and birthdays—

there was something about the way people gathered at my mom's store that seemed to lack the pretense and performance I witnessed everywhere else. As an adolescent, I was surrounded by messages that my value lay in being a "good Nigerian girl," and I was regularly scolded and quietly shamed for failing in this regard. Good Nigerian girls understood *and* spoke their mother tongue. Good Nigerian girls did well at school, but they didn't do too many extracurriculars so they could stay home and serve their parents. Good Nigerian girls were quiet and responded with "Yes, ma" and "No, ma." Good Nigerian girls cooked rice and stew for their siblings. Good Nigerian girls knelt to greet elders and never received things with their left hand. Good Nigerian girls were to become good Nigerian women who got married and had good Nigerian babies. But at the store, among the eclectic mix of objects and people I encountered day to day, this cultural essentialism and exceptionalism fell away. I was allowed to exist beyond just being a good Nigerian girl, and I was allowed to watch my mother exist beyond simply being a good Nigerian woman.

In that space, my mom was first and foremost an artist. An artist who brought traditional Nigerian textile treatments to T-shirts. An artist who brought people together in unique and unexpected configurations. An artist who curated the new and the old, the American and the international, for consumers who wandered in off the streets of Columbia, Missouri. There wasn't just one way to be at her store. It was just people who liked being there and liked being around my mom. The community was unique to the space, and the relationships were significant and consistent. The store became a place of communing and belonging—where people laughed, gossiped, and decompressed after long days at work. At the store, which became a sanctuary of sorts, you could (for the most part) just be.

At some point in the 1990s, my parents decided to open a café in the front of Batik Arts. The menu featured an eclectic mix of vegetarian Egusi stew, jollof rice, and my dad's "famous to us" chili. The customers loved it. For a time, they would host open mic nights on Thursdays—their first intentional attempt at creating a space for community to gather. In another facet of their diasporic homemaking, they created a new home for themselves and others by blending the foods and sounds they loved from Nigeria with those they had more recently fallen in love with in the States.

It was here at Batik Arts in downtown Columbia where my attraction to "outsiderness" began, surrounded by warm, kindhearted weirdos who validated everything I didn't like about myself simply by being adults who weren't ashamed to be different. The Store's location likely played a huge factor in curating the clientele. In our town of 100,000 people, the downtown was the

only real walkable commercial center (with the exception of the indoor mall), and it was connected to our mostly suburban landscape by the passably basic bus system. So downtown became a hub, of sorts, for all kinds of people. My mom's customers were the first queer and trans people I ever encountered. I also met people estranged from their families, neurodivergent folks, and those navigating mental illness, though I didn't know it at the time. They were artists and writers and activists. Many of them were immigrants, and some were undocumented.

At Batik Arts, there was somehow something for everyone who entered. It was this eclectic and kind community who taught me that belonging was available to those on the "outside"—you just had to create it.

At The Store, I, too, learned to create worlds where I belonged—drawing everything under the sun, writing stories, making up dances with the girl whose mom owned an antique store at the corner, and playing pretend with my brother for hours on end. For me, The Store was a world within a world, and it was made possible through the things we made with our hands.

After my mom died, when I googled "Batik Arts" and "Anthonia Akinbola" in "Columbia, MO," I expected to see the many articles and news stories that were written about the space during the fifteen years it was in business. But nothing came up. My/our memory of The Store lives in photographs and yellowed newspaper clippings saved by my dad and, of course, in the hearts and minds of the many people who passed time there.

And this is the nature of home and community: powerful and life-saving but ultimately fleeting.

I first encountered courage and experimentation in diasporic space at my mom's store. This book is dedicated to the outsiders who have created and navigated new worlds of belonging with the same spirit.

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I wish my mom, Anthonia Olusola Akinbola nee Macjob, could have been here to witness this book in its final form. She was my first example of disbelonging in action. I am so grateful to her for modeling what it looked like to make a living as an artist and to truly be in community. Dad, thank you for modeling critical thinking and global citizenship to me from a young age. You were the first one who taught me about the power and possibility of being in diaspora. Bunmi, thank you for being my one and only lifelong partner in diaspora, as well as for understanding the struggle and illuminating its beauty with your laughter. You inspire me.

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Introduction

DISBELONGING: A STRATEGY FOR OUR COLLECTIVE SURVIVAL

Transatlantic Disbelonging: Unruliness, Pleasure, and Play in Nigerian Diasporic Women's Art foregrounds the work of contemporary artists navigating disparate geographies, allegiances, and identities and examines how they resist popular understandings of what has been deemed proper conduct for women in Nigeria and its diaspora—a process I call "disbelonging." The book asks how the creative work of Nigerian diasporic artists speaks to the ways black diasporic women theorize their subjectivity through the practice of disbelonging. Specifically, I examine how these women embrace and employ anti-respectability, taboo, queerness, and play to reimagine and resist oppressive colonial legacies and expectations pertaining to gender, sexuality, and national belonging in Nigerian and Nigerian-adjacent contexts.

While much of the scholarship on diaspora has focused on the loss of home and yearning for belonging, the creative work of performance and mixed-media artists, filmmakers, and writers such as Wura-Natasha Ogunji, Njideka Akunyili

Crosby, Zina Saro-Wiwa, ruby onyinyechi amanze, and Nnedi Okorafor tells a different story. Each of these women artists, a term I use to encompass the vast array of artistic and creative production they are engaged in, has made significant contributions within the Nigerian diaspora's recent creative industry boom. Their diverse experiences as cultural outsiders, I suggest, have offered them the freedom to create home and define belonging on their own terms. Using visual art, performance and video art, and interviews with the artists as my guides, I consider how their works embrace their own ambivalence toward familial, cultural, and national belonging in Nigeria and its diaspora, as they redefine middle-class Nigerian womanhood. *Transatlantic Disbelonging* argues that for these women artists, their artmaking is an act of homemaking that creates opportunities to unsettle oppressive conceptualizations of community and family and embrace a range of affective tensions.

Disbelonging

Disbelonging as a practice reminds us that trauma isn't the only story there is to tell about being in dispersal. It instead asks us to consider what is gained for individuals who exist on the margins of their communities? Ogunji, Akunyili Crosby, Saro-Wiwa, amanze, and Okorafor resist neocolonial notions of middle-class respectability or morality by locating themselves in the full, complex pre- and postcolonial social and cultural history of Nigeria. Disbelonging as a concept offers language for thinking through how marginal subjects use their anti-respectable positionalities—as displaced, as "lost," as too hybrid to belong in just one place—as a mode of self-fashioning, which gives them a platform from which to challenge oppressive ideologies and envision new ways of relating. Not only normalizing but also embracing disbelonging as a way to orient oneself within and in relation to community pushes back on the deep-seated belief that the feeling of alienation is equal to cultural obliteration, when in fact alienation can serve as fertile ground for connection and possibility.

The idea of disbelonging has largely been used to describe a range of feelings and experiences antagonistic to belonging. [1] Cultural worker Arielle Julia Brown, for example, describes how site-specific black performance resists the contested narratives of disbelonging that stem from displacement and gentrification.[2] Roberto Bedoya follows this line of thinking in his discussion of the politics of creative placemaking, writing, "If Creative Placemaking activities support the politics of disbelonging through acts of gentrification, racism, real estate speculation, all in the name of neighborhood revitalization, then it betrays the democratic ideal of having an equitable and just civil society."[3] In these

examples, disbelonging describes the actions that make places uninhabitable for marginalized communities by intentionally displacing them. Yet, when applying the concept of disbelonging to diaspora, the vast majority of the many articles and essays that use the term *neglect* to explicitly define it. The term is generally used to describe a universally known and externally imposed condition rather than an act or position one might strategically embrace.[4]

In this book, I develop the concept of disbelonging to describe the ambivalent relationship between alienation and belonging. Disbelonging in this project refers to the ways Nigerian women artists use their art to remix, recode, and queer normative and coercive conceptualizations of cultural and national belonging in order to revel in the liberatory potential of their liminal diasporic positionalities. Their works depict visual and literary landscapes where women move freely through time and space, take on hybrid and nonhuman forms, and unapologetically embody contradiction.

Transatlantic Disbelonging considers how women artists metabolize and redress narratives of loss and displacement by illuminating the generative potential of disbelonging—space for diasporic subjects to embody complex and often taboo ways of being. In *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora*, Nadia Ellis speaks of the productive tension between "a desire to belong and a desire to flee the strictures of ground and community," noting that this tension is often marked by frustration and failure.[5] However, Ellis embraces this failure with ease, noting that in these instances, failure becomes an indication of a utopian reach. I take this failure as a jumping off point. Rather than work toward remedying feelings of alienation stemming from trauma and loss by performing hegemonic belonging or embracing antisocial ways of being, disbelonging is a strategy and viewpoint that interrupts colonial shame. Instead, it embraces anti-respectability as a critical tool in the cultivation of alternate belongings for diasporic subjects, particularly women. As Tavia Nyong'o clarifies, "Redress differs from reparation in that it is not a compensation for a loss—loss is immeasurable—but is rather an articulation of that loss."[6] Disbelonging articulates and embraces diasporic loss by considering how these artists stand firmly within their identities as women connected to the place presently called Nigeria, while refusing to be contained by prescriptive notions of the type of belonging they ought to desire or how they might perform it.

Notably, my use of *disbelonging* is inspired by José Muñoz's theory of disidentification, which describes the ways marginalized queer communities resist the dominant culture's "politics of impossibility" by appropriating and recycling components of that dominant culture in ways that reflect and celebrate

their own uniqueness. Muñoz writes, "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of those who do not conform to normative citizenship."[7] My theorization of disbelonging speaks to how the artists I highlight embrace the erotic, privilege experimentation and play, and cultivate queer social bonds in order to tell new stories about what it means to be part of a diaspora, imagine alternative embodiments, and cross psychic borders. This allows them to elude the constraints and rigid expectations of geographic borders, citizenship, and nation.

Disbelonging also builds upon the work of Gayatri Gopinath, who locates the queer female subject as "a crucial point of departure in theorizing diaspora."[8] Gopinath examines queer South Asian diasporic texts that are more interested in remaking "home" from within than in leaving it for a more liberatory place. I extend Gopinath's theorizing to discussions of women in the Nigerian diaspora, exploring performance, video installation, drawing, and literature as sites of diasporic dwelling—a practice in a type of diasporic homemaking. The acts of homemaking and home dismantling are central to the practice of disbelonging, which requires diasporic subjects to engage in an iterative and unruly practice of creating home. Moreover, the alienation stemming from the impossibility of the unruly diasporic subject of the unruly diasporic subject becomes the fertile ground for new types of belonging.[9] Tina Campt describes diasporic homemaking as "practices that are critical to diasporic formation yet frequently overshadowed by an emphasis on diasporic mobility."[10] Looking to photographic representations of domesticity, Campt argues that these images enact diasporic homemaking by emphasizing settling, dwelling, and rootedness, counteracting studies of diasporic migration that overwhelmingly focus on movement. I expand diasporic homemaking to include the act of creating home *within* the artistic works themselves. In the works I examine, the artists engage in a continuous practice of building and dismantling sites where diasporic belonging is practiced, rather than a point of arrival. This practice troubles the reification of the nation-state and the family, for instance, as the only sites where diasporic subjects create home and find belonging. Instead, it envisions the work of art as a dwelling and gathering place.

On Queerness

In his essay "Africa: Queer: Anthropology," Keguro Macharia critiques the anthropological lens that has framed how African studies has approached queerness, writing: "I could not seem to escape anthropology when I turned to

Africa—obligatory reminder, I am not an Africanist. I could not escape how it mapped place and belonging (tribe, ethnicity, clan, kinship); how it marked temporality and being (savage, primitive, undeveloped, underdeveloped, global south); how it marked African knowledge (proverbs, sayings, indigenous wisdom, elders, sages); how it marked African intimacies (kinship, ritual, initiation); how it marked African encounters with modernity (acculturation, loss, deracination); how it kept shuttling between 'tradition' and 'modernity.' I found—I find—all of this stifling and unimaginative and boring." Here, Macharia names how anthropology's focus on colonial categorizations and binaries has limited our understanding of how these categories have never been stable or separate. Macharia looks to queer theory in order to think through what it means to be estranged from these categories and allow ourselves to explore uncharted waters. As he writes, "We would do well to construct queer theory . . . less as the site of what we communally want than as the want of any communal site. Queer theory is no one's safe harbor for the holidays; it should offer no image of home."[11] I position disbelonging as a particularly queer way of being in community, one that destabilizes the categories named by Macharia. While these categories have been used to flatten how African diasporic communities are described, I instead look to the ways labor, affect, and imagination commingle to create fleeting communal sites of belonging—sites that are continuously reimagined and reinvented.

Gopinath argues that attaching *queer* to *diaspora* attends to the practices and subjectivities that have been invisibilized within conventional diaspora and nationalist imaginaries. She writes: "The concept of a queer South Asian diaspora, then, functions on multiple levels. . . . First, in situating the formation of sexual subjectivity within transnational flows of culture, capital, bodies, desire, and labor. Second, queer diaspora contests the logic that situates the terms 'queer' and 'diaspora' as dependent on the originality of 'heterosexuality' and 'nation.' Finally, it disorganizes the dominant categories within the United States for sexual variance, namely 'gay and lesbian,' and it marks a different economy of desire that escapes legibility within both normative South Asian contexts and homo-normative Euro-American contexts."[12] Here, *queer* refers to a range of dissenting and nonheteronormative practices and desires that may or may not fall within sexual identity categories such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In this project, then, I use *queer* to describe the gap between the artists I discuss and the myths surrounding nation and womanhood. To borrow the words of Gopinath, "Queerness here does not so much bravely or heroically refuse the normative, the way it appears to in some narratives of queer subjectivity, as much as it names the impossibility of normativity for racialized subjects

marked by histories of violent dispossession."[13] The works of these artists show the ways in which their living, breathing diasporic bodies are perpetually at odds with the rigid systems, categories, and identities designed to hold them captive.

Though I use the words *community* and *home* throughout this book, they are as troubled among these pages as they are in my own lived experience. Miranda Joseph's and Zygmunt Bauman's critiques of community, as well as Carol B. Stack's and Michelle V. Rowley's meditations on home, have contributed to my thinking about the complications and limitations of community and home. Joseph writes, "Community is almost always invoked as an unequivocal good, and indicator of high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging."[14] And yet this is often not the full story, as communities also require members to make sacrifices in order to make their belonging legible. To this point Bauman writes: "There is a price to be paid for the privilege of 'being in a community'—and it is inoffensive or even invisible only as long as the community stays in the dream. The price is paid in the currency of freedom, variously called 'autonomy,' 'right to self-assertion,' 'right to be yourself.' Whatever you choose, you gain some, you lose some. Missing community means missing security; gaining community if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom."[15]

The idea of home is equally implicated in these logics, as Stack writes: "Home is a hard fact, not just a souvenir of restless memory, and for the people I know who made the journey away and back, home is in a hard land—hard to explain, hard to make a living in, hard to swallow."[16] Rowley similarly asserts that "the idea of 'home' becomes (remains) a place where we have no guarantee of safety, a place where we may at times have to make peace with a sense of feeling unsafe."[17] It is this anticipated denial or loss of the freedom, understanding, and safety associated with home that the artists I discuss work to resist and creatively circumvent.

Numerous stories chronicle the pervasive disappointment felt when descendants of the transatlantic slave trade return to the African continent only to find the same complicated feelings of nonbelonging they experienced in the United States.[18] While the contentiousness of community has been taken up by a number of scholars in Black studies, there is a tension between this knowledge and the romanticization of the type of belonging that is speculated to have been experienced by Africans before colonization and to exist today for those "who never left."[19] In exploring the experience of Nigerian diasporas, this book also asks how these theories are complicated by the work of artists like

Akunyili Crosby, Saro-Wiwa, and amanze who take up questions of community, family, and kin for those born on Nigerian soil.

Methods

This book has grown from my deep investment in understanding the creative choice-making and methods used by these artists to help them navigate their complex identities as artists and as black diasporic women. The goal is not to evaluate or critique the success or failure of the artists and the works I analyze. Instead, I identify the tools and tactics utilized by these artists for their survival and attend to art as a theory-making practice. *Transatlantic Disbelonging* argues that methodologically foregrounding the cultural production of these artists provides us with a strong framework for mapping, visualizing, rethinking, and redefining diaspora as a series of processes that produce a certain type of subjectivity. Moreover, while I occasionally discuss reception as it relates to the experience of the performers, I am more concerned with the significance of the works of art and performances for the makers.

This book makes four key interventions. First, I foreground the role of visual art, performance art, film, and literature in producing some of the most acutely instructive theorizations of how black women experience and embody diaspora.

Second, this project complicates discussions that reduce diasporic flows within, to, and from the African continent to an antagonistic relationship between the local and the diaspora. The artists discussed in *Transatlantic Disbelonging* highlight how these categories fail to capture the complexity and nuance of Nigerian identity, as I examine how the categories of local and diaspora ideologically and aesthetically shape one another.

Third, I center women in conversations about migration, expatriation, and return, acknowledging that we cannot talk about diaspora and belonging without considering how gender and sexuality shape these experiences. I argue that national belonging for black diasporic women is always contested, and I use disbelonging to think through how diasporic women use outsiderness and the experience of "going against one's culture" as a position from which to aspire toward attaining freedom from nationalist, familial, and cultural expectations and sexual regulation. I don't mean for my use of *freedom* here to imply something uncomplicated or uncontested, particularly for black women. Still, it is a guiding light throughout this book, and the longing for it is reflected in each pencil stroke, gesture, and word. As Joshua Chambers-Letson states,

"Freedom, within liberalism, is an impossibility—a cruel joke or what Lauren Berlant describes as cruel optimism. . . . And, still, freedom is that which we cannot not want."[20]

Lastly, I seek to contribute to African diasporic visual and performance art history by expanding the canon of Nigerian diasporic artists beyond the few, primarily male, artists who are taught in every African art survey.

Transatlantic Disbelonging takes an interdisciplinary and multimethods approach to questions of national belonging, desire, and diasporic homemaking as an act of resistance and historical reinterpretation. My conceptual treatment of diaspora, reimagining of belonging, and centering of aesthetic practices has been shaped and energized by scholarly work emerging from African, African diaspora, and Black studies; South Asian studies; American studies; women, gender, and sexuality studies; art history; and performance studies. Here I practice disbelonging by refusing to restrict belonging to any one discipline, instead embracing the many, and at times contradictory, schools of thought that I am indebted to.

I deploy the methods of visual analysis, interviews, and literary analysis to consider the works of art from numerous vantage points, particularly as they relate to their creators and social contexts. My methods of visual analysis are similarly hybrid, combining formal analysis, sociohistorical and cultural contextual analysis, and the words of the artists themselves. My decision to include the intentions of the artists alongside my own readings of their works is inspired by the work of art historians Cherise Smith, Renée Ater, and Margo Machida.[21] Citing the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Smith argues that autobiographical writing is a "significant site where women assert and give form to their subjectivities, revise concepts of women's life issues, and make visible formerly invisible topics."[22] She positions the writing of artists as being more than "inextricably linked" to their performances, but performances in and of themselves. Moreover, Ater contends that "one deeply troubling aspect of critical theory's insistence on an unknowable subject is that too often it renders men and women of color invisible in art historical texts and excludes them from the construction of art history."[23]

In a project specifically concerned with how women tell their own stories, I argue that it is methodologically critical to consider the multiple sites where these artists produce meaning about their artmaking practice, including articles, interviews, and personal blog posts. Moreover, arguing that a work of art is "an intentional manifestation of mind," and that the meanings embedded in cross-ethnic and intercultural work are rarely transparent, Machida advocates for scholars of art practicing interpretation as a collaborative act with the artist

when possible.[24] Machida's assertion resists notions that when deciphering a work of art "the human subject is unknowable, decentered, and dispersed" and that anyone should be able to fully interpret a successful work of art with no input from the artist.[25] She contends that for racialized subjects doing cross-ethnic and intercultural work, the meanings behind their work are not intended to be deciphered easily, and a full and nuanced understanding comes through collaboration with the artists.

The meanings I draw and extrapolate upon come from a combination of formal analysis and my own observations, as well as the knowledge gathered from my correspondence with several of the artists and their public offerings about their work. Together, they offer a multifaceted perspective of the myriad ways their art speaks to the themes of gendered diasporic experience and belonging. Here I embrace Dwight Conquergood's theory of "co-performative witnessing," inspired by Frederick Douglass, who "instead of reading textual accounts of slavery, recommended a riskier hermeneutics of experience, relocation, copresence, humility and vulnerability."[26] As D. Soyini Madison asserts, "Co-performative witnessing is to live in and spend time in the borderlands of contested identities where you speak 'with' not 'to' others and where your (and their) ethnographic interlocutors are as co-temporal in the report and on stage as they were in the field."[27] Through this project, Ogunji, Akunyili Crosby, Saro-Wiwa, amanze, and Okorafor become collaborators in theorizing diaspora and, as such, are positioned alongside African women scholars and activists as my theoretical interlocutors.

I bring to this project my own experiences and curiosities as a second-generation American of Nigerian descent, an artist, and a scholar who has grappled with the stories I was told about Nigeria and what my belonging in a diasporic context was supposed to look and feel like through my own artmaking and through experiencing the art made by other diasporic artists. My interest in using art also stems from my own scholarly investments in centering the visual as a powerful lens through which to study and theorize the slippery affective and everyday experience of diaspora. In this project, although I am theorizing about ways of seeing and being seen, intimacy, and community, I am also very much writing about seemingly insurmountable loneliness and alienation and what it means to sit with it, work with it, and attempt to transform it.

It feels necessary to name the complicated, and at times transactional, nature of some of my interactions with my interlocutors: interviews in bars, over the phone, via email, and over Zoom in the midst of a pandemic; scheduling mishaps, last minute cancellations, and full-on ghosting. I once met an artist at an art opening for the first time after months of correspondence, and we

barely spoke the whole night. And then there's the embarrassment of making a joke that doesn't quite land or sharing an experience that your fellow diasporan cannot relate to at all. These are the affective remains of disbelonging, which creates space for moving beyond and through disappointment, opening the possibility for us to meet on our own terms, rather than merely as ideas. This research has taught me that there is no such thing as a "community of the disbelonged." Rather, there are bids for connection and fleeting moments where these bids are successful.[28] I don't share this to discount the beautiful work that has been written about queer, intimate, and transcendent forms of ethnography that blur the lines between researcher and interlocutor to allow for a new type of radical intimacy. Though this has not necessarily been my experience with all the artists I met while conducting this research, this project has also gifted me many opportunities to be witnessed and to witness others in profound ways. But more importantly, this project is about how art exceeds, magnifies, and multiplies our limited offerings as humans. How it speaks, connects, and throws a life raft when community is hard. When I refer to belonging as "fleeting," I am referring to the spontaneous shared laughter during an interview, or magically making eye contact over Zoom, or emailing back and forth about a performance art idea with one of my interlocutors. These moments say nothing about what has come before or what will come after and, through this project, I have learned that sometimes this is all we can hope for, and maybe that can be enough.

Notes on My Uses of *Diaspora*

This book calls into question the construction of diasporas and how we understand them and disrupts the ways they have been homogenized, pointing to the deep complexity and range of experiences that exist within these dispersed global communities. Although the artists whom I write about are technically situated within what we call the Nigerian diaspora, their experiences are deeply varied. Moreover, each of these artists uses their art to speak to a wider diasporic community as they consider how their blackness and gender identities shape, inform, and disrupt their lived realities in all the places they attempt to call home. I ask: What about a nation presumes a shared experience, and why do we take this approach when talking about diaspora? What is revealed when we allow the nuance of diaspora to unfold? In *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, Alexander Weheliye writes: "Diaspora offers pathways that retrace layerings of difference in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery, as well as the effects of other forms of migration and displacement. Thus, diaspora enables

the desedimentation of the nation from the 'interior' by taking into account the groups that fail to comply with the reigning definition of the people as a cohesive political subject due to sharing one culture, one race, one language, one religion, and so on, and from the 'exterior' by drawing attention to the movements that cannot be contained by the nation's administrative and ideological borders."[29] Focusing on Nigeria specifically, this project pushes against the falsehood of the Nigerian diaspora as a cohesive political or cultural grouping. I use *diasporic* not as a static signifier, but as a way to describe a particular orientation that looks toward the real and imagined homeland in order to decenter and destabilize the West as the primary locus from which to understand and position oneself.

In "The Uses of Diaspora," Brent Hayes Edwards offers a rich history of how *diaspora* has been used in Black Cultural Studies, beginning with shifts toward internationalism and Pan-Africanism in the 1950s and 1960s.[30] Central in Edwards's genealogy is the work of George Shepperson, credited with being one of the first scholars to consider the limitations of Pan-Africanism and introduce the concept of diaspora into the study of black culture and history. In his essay "African Diaspora: Concept and Context," Shepperson makes a clear distinction between *diaspora* as it has been used to refer to the forced dispersal of Jewish people and "African diaspora," where *diaspora* is used metaphorically. Shepperson argues that while in the Jewish tradition, *galut* implies a forced dispersal, *diaspora* in fact "has always included some form of voluntary exile."[31] Shepperson's emphasis on the metaphorical nature of *diaspora* as it applies to individuals of African descent is key here as it pushes us away from attempting to create a static definition or list of traits to apply to the African diaspora.

Indeed, according to Edwards, diaspora—unlike Pan-Africanism—has the potential to account for the "unavoidable dynamics of difference." Explaining how the meanings and uses of *diaspora* for black scholars have changed between 1970 and 2000, Edwards writes: "Like Pan-Africanism [diaspora] is open to ideological appropriation in a wide variety of political projects, from anticolonial activism to what has long been called 'Black Zionism'—articulations of *diaspora* that collapse the term into versions of nationalism or racial essentialism. Unfortunately, some of the most celebrated work on *diaspora* in the past thirty years has served to undo this complex history of emergence."[32]

Edwards thus addresses how diaspora has often been used to unite black people across the globe, with little consideration for the multitude of ways diaspora has been experienced by black people in different parts of the world. This is particularly relevant when considering the implications that diaspora might have on the African continent.

Edwards also examines the differences between diaspora and the Black Atlantic, arguing that although Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic is dependent on the concept of diaspora, Gilroy does not actually define *diaspora*. While this is true, Gilroy's emphasis on the importance of acknowledging creolization, *mestizaje*, and hybridity, or "the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis) continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents" has pushed scholarship toward a clearer definition of *diaspora*, as has Stuart Hall's emphasis on "difference" in African diasporic cultural identities.[33] While Hall acknowledges that having a shared past of colonization, slavery, and transportation is significant, he also argues that this does not constitute a common origin, and thus we must pay attention to the particularities of each history.

Hall's conceptualization of difference helps illuminate the importance of analyzing artists who are, at a surface level, part of the same diaspora, but positioned very differently. Details such as how people migrate, when they migrate, why they migrate, if they stay in the host country, and why they choose to return speak magnitudes. For Hall, "The diaspora experience . . . is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity,' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity***.** Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."[34] In other words, diaspora is not something that you simply *are*, but rather the process of becoming in the face of difference.

In recent years the label of "New African Diaspora," coined by Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu, has been taken up by scholars of diaspora to specifically identify first- and second-generation African immigrants. Drawing the line between the old and new diaspora, Okpewho writes: "We might begin to understand these relations by characterizing the older diaspora as *precolonial* and the more recent one as *postcolonial*, or by using the demarcation Ali Mazrui has drawn between what he calls the diaspora of enslavement and the diaspora of imperialism."[35]

As the name "New African Diaspora" implies, this framework seems to break from the lineage of diaspora explored by Edwards and Shepperson, and it follows Hall's guidance by tending to the specific differences between the descendants of Africans who were brought to the Americas in bondage and Africans who have migrated as a result of the destruction and "disequilibrium in African societies brought about by the intervention of European colonization."[36] A consideration of these two articulations of *diaspora* allows us to better capture the diverse and nuanced ways imperialism and white supremacy

have worked to turn human beings into property while also systemically draining resources from the African continent, decimating the natural environment, and creating a political landscape that has made the continent unrecognizable and unlivable for so many.

While this project does not attempt to conflate the experiences of the descendants of the enslaved and those displaced by colonization, I am interested in how the contentiousness of belonging is presumed to be experienced only by those who were forcefully removed from the continent, and less complicated for immigrants and their descendants due to their "blood ties" to one specific place. Gopinath points out that although slavery and postcolonial displacement are distinct from one another, we must treat them as intimately connected, writing: "Clearly, the traumas and space/time disjunctures precipitated by slavery are distinct from those of indentureship and postcolonial displacement; each of these historical phenomena engenders its own affective ties, traps, and possibilities. At the same time, situating these formations as utterly incommensurate rather than as co-constitutive ignores, in Lisa Lowe's evocative phrase, 'the intimacy of four continents.'"[37]

I seek to name and identify the ways that belonging is not so easily remedied by blood and the meaning we attribute to it, and the ways that colonization and global anti-blackness displace and alienate black people within and from our own homelands, creating a perpetual and existential homelessness, or what Homi K. Bhabha calls "unhomliness," that is mediated only through the creation and embodiment of home. [38] As Frank B. Wilderson III aptly reminds us:

> Lest we think that this force is merely the grammar and ghosts of blacks in the "New" World, that somehow Africans of the twentieth and twenty-first century have an altogether different rebar of ontology, we should note Achille Mbembe's argument that, once Hegel (as a placeholder for all the punishing discourse of the Maafa, or African Holocaust) renders Africa "territorium nullius," "the land of motionless substance and of the blinding, joyful, and tragic disorder of creation," even the African who was not captured was a slave in relation to the rest of the world, his or her freedom from chains and distance from the Middle Passage notwithstanding.[39]

In an effort to capture the heterogeneity and diversity of diaspora, *Transatlantic Disbelonging* contributes to the small but growing body of work on second-generation immigrants and the even smaller field of research focused specifically on how gender and sexuality inform and shape how 1.5- and second-generation African women conceive of and navigate national borders. Two

pieces of scholarship on this topic are *Beyond Expectations: Second-Generation Nigerians in the United States and Britain* by Onoso Imoagene and the 2019 special issue titled "Identity and Transnationalism: The New African Diaspora Second Generation in the United States," edited by Kassahun Kebede, in *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*. Both consider the contributions of second-generation Africans to both the home and host countries. In *Beyond Expectations*, Imoagene examines the process by which second-generation Nigerians incorporate into United States and British society, and their identity formation processes, via interviews with 150 second-generation adults in Nigeria and Britain. Primarily focusing on how they form multifaceted identities, beyond racialization, she argues that their presence in the black middle class has the potential to change the "largely negative ways black people are viewed and possibly help redefine what it means to be black in both countries."[40] The special issue built on this mission, seeking to contribute to a gap in literature on African immigrants, asserting that, despite its large and growing size, the New African Diaspora's second generation is one of the least studied immigrant groups. The special issue used a variety of case studies to explore what we know about the identity formation of this group and considered new directions in research, primarily focusing on questions of racial identity formation and transnational activities among second-generation African immigrants. In his introduction, Kassahun Kebede—taking a primarily sociological approach—focuses largely on questions about how second-generation African immigrants distinguish themselves from African Americans and serve as bridges between the host and home country. He writes: "The New African Diaspora and their offspring can help revitalize interest in Africa among the historic African diaspora. They may also serve as trans-Atlantic bridge builders, 'as cultural mediators between the continent and its old diaspora, whose communication and knowledge of each other has largely been through the distorted lenses and prejudices of imperialist and racist media.'"[41]

In this quote, Kebede sees a key contribution of the New African Diaspora and their offspring as being one of service to the home country on the continent by serving as bridge builders. Though not explicitly stated, this bridge-building capacity also serves nationalistic purposes by seeking to use the diasporans to bolster the reputation of the home country. It is a collectivist rather than individualistic endeavor, which assumes a certain commitment to sameness and unity, rather than attention to differences or friction, which my theorization of disbelonging centers.

In addition to giving much attention to race and class, the special issue also reflects an overall assumption of strong identification and cultural cohesion

among Africans, as conflict and misidentification are discussed as part of conflict between Africans and African Americans. In the words of Kebede, "Thus, the attachment of African immigrants to their distinctive ethnic identities is positive rather than negative; they seek to enrich the American cultural landscape rather than merely avoid a stigma they had no part in historically."[42] While the special issue examines how the New African Diaspora maintains transnational ties through practices such as sending remittances, traveling to visit family, and informal diplomacy, there is no significant discussion of artmaking or creative practice.[43] *Transatlantic Disbelonging* names artmaking as a transnationalist and *anti*nationalist practice for Nigerian diasporic women in particular. In her article "Fitting In and Standing Out: Identity and Transnationalism Among Second-Generation African Immigrants in the United States," Elizabeth Chacko describes transnational activities as "the recreation of the home community through social customs, religious practices, foodways and linguistic traditions."[44] Chacko finds that the parents of 1.5- and second-generation immigrants played a major role in the identity formation of her interlocutors, writing:

> The influence of first-generation parents in identity formation during childhood and adolescence was reiterated by the emerging adults in this study. Most parents stressed the importance of national origin to their children and maintained origin country and so-called African values and norms in the home such as respect for elders, strong family and ethnic ties and a focus on education to improve one's socio-economic standing. Parents buttressed ethno-national identities through frequent exposure to and interaction with co-ethnic peers at informal gatherings and through regular connections with a host of ethnic institutions such as ethnic churches and cultural organizations.[45]

This focus on the importance of African "values and norms," respect for elders, and strong family ties in the identity formation of 1.5- and second-generation immigrants also comes up in *Beyond Expectations*, where Imoagene asked her interlocutors what behaviors they felt defined their Nigerianness, particularly in contrast to African Americans. Multiple respondents focused on obeying their parents' strict rules, respecting elders, and focusing on school. For the women interviewed, there was an emphasis on not being sexually active or ending up pregnant. While Imoagene identifies these behaviors as a type of capital that ultimately benefits second-generation Nigerians, my study uses disbelonging not only to draw attention to the limitations and dangers of this thinking but also to better understand those who choose not to adhere to these norms.

Moreover, in Chacko's study, while of the thirty participants interviewed, twenty-two were female, there is no explicit discussion of how gender impacts the particular ways 1.5-generation and second-generation immigrants are expected to participate in transnational activities. While scholars like Gopinath have written extensively about the place of sex and gender in diasporic identity formation, this is an example of how the role of gender in diasporic negotiations has been underexplored in conversations about 1.5- and second-generation African immigrants.

Transatlantic Disbelonging unsettles homogeneous characterizations of national diasporas by highlighting the nuance and complexity of Nigerian identity, considering the ways that Nigerian diasporic identity becomes fluid and porous as it crosses, intersects, and overlaps with other diasporas in Nigeria, Europe, and the United States. Given the size and breadth of the Nigerian diaspora, and the growing body of work on migration, diaspora, and the contributions of first- and second-generation immigrants, surprisingly little scholarship has been produced about subject formation within the Nigerian diaspora. While I refer to the "Nigerian diaspora" throughout this book, by focusing on this diaspora, my goal is to consider how a "micro" study of the African diaspora brings to light the minute negotiations, cultural exchanges, and border crossings that are often overlooked when we conduct large-scale surveys of African diasporic art in order to provide a fuller understanding of black subject formations that are not solely beholden to colonial understandings of place.

It is important to remember that the land called Nigeria and the people called Nigerians did not exist until the twentieth century. As Nigerian historians Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton write: "Over the course of human history, many different groups of people have migrated into and out of the region that is now known as Nigeria. Many societies and states, and even vast empires, have risen and fallen, none of them having had any direct correlation to the Nigerian state that exists today. . . . The only geophysical boundary of Nigeria is the Atlantic Ocean, which forms the southernmost border of the country."[46] The name "Nigeria" is said to have been suggested by Flora Shaw, the wife of British colonial administrator Frederick Lugard, who oversaw the 1917 unification of the Nigerian northern and southern protectorates.[47]

Significant migration out of Nigeria began in 1960 after the country gained its independence from England. Between 1950 and 1970, colonial ties drew Nigerian elites to England to further their education, but it was also common for those who had emigrated to return and assume jobs with the civil service or within the private sector, as part of the booming oil economy. Starting in 1970 and continuing through the 1980s, growing political tensions increased the

number of emigrants, who also began flowing into the United States. Unlike the emigrants of the 1950s and 1960s, these Nigerians stayed abroad longer and some never returned. By 1978, an estimated thirty thousand Nigerian graduates from higher institutions in the United Kingdom were living outside the country, and between 1974 and 1995 Nigerian migration to the United States grew from 670 to 6,818—an increase of over 900 percent.[48] According to the 2020 United States Census, Nigerians were the African immigrant group with the largest presence in the United States, with a population of 493,188.[49] Europe is also home to a significant Nigerian diaspora, with the largest number living in the United Kingdom.[50]

Transatlantic Disbelonging primarily focuses on works produced between 2007 and 2013, years that proved foundational in the establishment of Lagos as a global city for contemporary art. I credit curator Bisi Silva as playing a critical role in this transformation for Nigerian diasporic women artists with the 2007 transformation of her Institute of Visual Arts and Culture to the Center for Contemporary Art Lagos, which was her first brick-and-mortar arts space in Nigeria.[51] Other significant advances include the founding of the African Artist Foundation in 2007 and the Lagos Photo Festival in 2010.

It is not lost on me that the ability of the artists I discuss to embrace outsiderness is facilitated by their status as diasporans, regardless of their country of birth. To many, these artists fall under the category of "Afropolitans."[52] Where Anima Adjepong defines the Afropolitan they write, "Afropolitans are the newest generation of African emigrants [with] American accent, European affect, African ethos. This definition, which emphasizes an understanding of Afropolitan-as-identity, also affirms hybridity and seamless movement through different spaces."[53]

The presence of US passports, signaling access to the city centers in the West controlling the international art market, as well as prestigious fellowships like the Fulbright and the Guggenheim, give them a social capital that makes possible what is professionally impossible for most Nigerians. Critiques of Afropolitanism have positioned these individuals as "class privileged Africans who reside outside the continent . . . an elite identity primarily concerned with aesthetics and consumerism—Africa without Africans."[54] Adjepong goes on to explain that while class privilege signals economic capital, like money, for most, for Afropolitan subjects, social and cultural capital—the people you know and the way you're able to carry yourself through space—are the more relevant factors.[55] Driven by middle-class cultural politics and social concerns, what Adjepong calls "Afropolitan projects" work in the service of promoting a type of global citizenship. In their words: "Those who enact Afropolitan projects aim

to show that middle-class Africans rightfully belong as cosmopolitan citizens of the world. This political project is enacted through an emphasis on respectability and class with a colonial habitus that simultaneously affirms and rejects the idea that 'West is best.'"[56]

In the context of the artists I discuss in this book, the work of disbelonging becomes a type of Afropolitan project and is most easefully utilized and performed by middle-class subjects with a certain amount of class and social privilege, regardless of their subject positions as queer and/or as women. But disbelonging also violates the rules and expectations of an ideal Afropolitan subject, particularly through its embrace of taboo and disinterest in respectability.

In "The Politics of Exclusion: The Undue Fixation on Western Based African Diaspora Artists," Ghanaian artist Rikki Wemega-Kwawu argues that African artists living in the West have been favored over their counterparts living on the African continent. Blaming Nigerian curator, art historian, and cultural critic Okwui Enwezor, Wemega-Kwawu writes: "Enwezor and his disciples should know that we cannot all go live in the West. Many of us continue to live in Africa by choice. African artists living in Africa are enraged and incensed by Enwezor's African diaspora bias. They see it as a diabolical strategy against them, calculated to undermine their efforts in Africa and hamstring their growth. So instead of working in unison for the common good of Africa, African artists in Africa now see themselves pitched in an unholy confrontation against their counterparts abroad: the local versus the Diaspora."[57]

Transatlantic Disbelonging seeks to complicate Wemega-Kwawu's interpretation of the diasporic flows to and from the African continent as an antagonistic relationship between "local artists" and "diaspora artists," instead considering how the categories of "diasporan" and "local" are perpetually in flux and often defined by productive friction that introduces opportunities to build solidarity and encourages collaboration. My interest in "friction" is shaped by Anna Tsing's theorizing of what she defines as "the awkward unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference."[58] For Tsing, friction describes the interactions that coproduce culture. In her words, "speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency."[59] I am also thinking here of Macharia's discussion of the pressing, rubbing, and "intense longing for intimacy" that defines the experience of diaspora. Theorizing this particular friction as *frottage*, he writes, "I use frottage to suggest diaspora as multiplicity of sense apprehensions, including recognition, disorientation, compassion, pity, disgust, condescension, lust, titillation, arousal and exhaustion."[60] Looking to friction and frottage allows for a more nuanced conversation about how the

diasporic artists I write about negotiate power, privilege, and difference, while also navigating a range of intimate collaborations, as they slip between the art world in the West and in Nigeria.

In a hypercapitalistic and increasingly globalized Nigeria, the dual status of these artists also gives them the ability to support and amplify the work of less mobile and resourced artists within Nigeria. This, combined with the power of social media to connect artists around the globe, adds to an increased blurring of the divisions Wemega-Kwawu maps. As Jess Castellote and Tobenna Okwuosa write:

> The easy accessibility of global news and information through the Internet and cable television has expanded the horizons of a significant percentage of contemporary Nigerian artists at home, who now see, on a daily basis, art activities in global art worlds such as New York, London, and Paris. These persons have become more global citizens than citizens of a nation-state, and some of them reflect their new global identity and consciousness in their creative works. With the improved condition and democratization of communication, African artists no longer have to live and work in the West to be seen.[61]

While this does not negate the fact that artists positioned in the West are far more likely to find recognition and success, it is not insignificant that many successful Nigerian artists in the diaspora are shipping their works to Lagos to be part of exhibitions, auctions, and art fairs, a sign of the growing global significance of Lagos's art world.[62] By moving between Nigeria and more "powerful" countries like England and the United States, even setting up art spaces in Lagos and Port Harcourt, each of these artists attempts to reconcile the complexities of being black Nigerian women in decidedly anti-black and sexist art worlds. They are also attempting to find success as artists and create new possibilities for future artists on the continent and elsewhere.

Moreover, even within the elite circle of Nigerian diasporic art world darlings, the most celebrated artists since the 1990s have overwhelmingly been male. As bell hooks asserts, "Patriarchal politics in the realm of the visual frequently ensure that works by powerful men, and that includes men of color, receive more attentional and are given greater authority of voice than works by women. While feminist thinkers of all races have made rebellious critical interventions to challenge the art world and art practices, much of their groundbreaking work is used, but not cited, by males."[63] For instance, while artists like Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Yinka Shonibare are celebrated as among the most influential Nigerian artists of our times, their female counterparts—take, for example,

Ndidi Dike and Sokari Douglas Camp—have long gone under-recognized. In light of this history, the explosion of young Nigerian diasporic women finding art world success beginning in the late aughts has played a pivotal role in shifting attitudes and has led to the cultivation of more art spaces featuring their work both in Nigeria and throughout the diaspora.

One potential reason for the under-recognition of Nigerian diasporic women artists is the failure of diaspora studies to address gender. This is most exemplified by the masculinist nature of the discourse of diaspora, which has failed to acknowledge its reification of the experiences of men. In the words of James Clifford, "experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diaspora and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences."[64] This project counters the masculinist tendency to focus solely on movement and also considers the, at times, quiet acts of settling and dwelling, and local and national rootedness. Rather than focus on the places diasporic subjects leave and where they arrive, build roots, and attempt to access citizenship, I am interested in what I call "micro rooting points"—in a performance piece, in a work of art, in a film—where diasporic women find fleeting moments of belonging.

African queer feminist and researcher Rita Nketiah addresses the limiting and oppressive masculinist discourses surrounding African and African diasporic women and girls in her article "Why Respectability Politics Is Failing African Women and Girls."[65] She writes, "Respectability politics kills dreams. It forces us to see ourselves not as free and autonomous beings, but always indebted to someone else, always prioritizing the needs and expectations of someone else, always upholding the 'dignity of the family.'"[66] Naming the proliferation of the ideas that "boys will be boys," that women should police their appearance so as not to attract negative attention, that marriage and children are the most important aspirations women should have, and that it is always a woman's job to serve male elders, Nketiah criticizes the pervasiveness of the patriarchal idea that African women do not have control over their bodies or their futures, and are forever indebted to their families and their culture. She ends the essay asserting, "I am interested in an African feminist vision that moves us away from respectability politics for women and girls. I want us to feel liberated to be our full selves without the demands of 'culture' weighing heavily on us."[67] To Nketiah's point, this project calls into question how the artists I discuss work around these cultural demands toward their own liberation.

I characterize these examples of discipline and control, which are often shielded by the banner of "tradition" or "culture," as examples of what Nancy

Van Dyke calls "hazy trauma," which refers to the trauma that cannot be traced back to any one event, but rather numerous recurrent events, which may even be seen as instructive and beneficial by those in positions of authority.[68] This trauma can also be called "complex trauma," which is prolonged and repeated and occurs "where the victim is in a state of captivity, under the control of the perpetrator."[69] Psychiatrist Judith Herman states, "The psychological impact of subordination to coercive control has many common features, whether it occurs within the public sphere of politics or within the private sphere of sexual and domestic relations."[70] This complex trauma is the direct result of attempting to both survive and resist what Pumla Dineo Gqola calls the "Female Fear Factory," which she defines as "a theatrical and public performance of patriarchal policing of and violence towards women and others cast as female, who are, therefore, considered safe to violate. It requires an audience, and relies on a series of recognisable cues to communicate with those who watch, because patriarchy ensures that we are socialized to recognize these cues in a process of fluency. . . . The Female Fear Factory travels through respectability and through repetition so that we no longer recognise it for what it is, consequently taking it for granted as 'life.'"[71] For Gqola, the Female Fear Factory is a cultural performance of collectivity that comes to be understood as "culture." Ezinne Michaelia Ezepue and Chidera G. Nwafor explore the origins of this trauma by tracing its colonial roots in their article "October 1: Metaphorizing Nigeria's Collective Trauma of Colonization," which uses the 2014 Nollywood film *October 1* to examine the complex trauma of colonization in Nigeria, and argue for decolonization as a form of therapy.[72] Pointing to forceful depositions, exiling, the separation of families, and the destruction of homes and sources of livelihood,[73] the authors contend that "Colonization is traumatic to a nation as abuse is to an individual."[74] Additionally, the formal end of colonization brought new traumas, as Kenyan psychiatrist F. G. Njenga writes:

> In the late fifties and early sixties, with the promise of independence, Africans lived the life of hope that the triple problems of poverty, ignorance and disease would evaporate under the wise leadership of their new rulers. For most Africans, the dream of a new life remained just that—a dream. Following the death of the fathers of African independence, and as African governments fell in rapid succession, the stage was set for the steady decline of law and order, and the wars and internal strife rapidly gave way to increasing poverty, ignorance and disease. As often happens, and as had been the case during the colonial era, it was the most vulnerable, women and children who bore the brunt of those conflicts.[75]

I am particularly compelled by Ezepue and Nwafor's proposition that decolonization is the only way to heal this trauma, given that this project considers the role of artmaking in decolonization struggles. In Lisa Biggs's discussion of "stage healing," a practice of radical storytelling that utilizes black expressive culture to redress and examine interpersonal and institutional harm, she writes "cultivating the ability to narrate one's life and tell your own stories is essential for healing and liberation.[76] Speaking to the relationship between storytelling and decolonization efforts, Hawaiian sovereignty activist Poka Laenui writes in "Processes of Decolonization" that there are five steps to decolonization, including (1) rediscovery and recovery, (2) mourning, (3) dreaming, (4) commitment, and (5) action, which don't necessarily progress linearly and can be experienced simultaneously.[77]

I find both Biggs's and Laenui's frameworks useful when considering the relationship between artmaking, healing, and decolonization as it draws clear distinctions between the aspects of healing and decolonization that happen on the individual level and the aspects that require collective action, without demonizing any act as unimportant or without use. While societies are typically framed as either individualistic *or* collectivist (with the Global South almost always falling into the latter category), disbelonging acknowledges that individualism's prioritization of the intrinsic worth of the individual is, in fact, a key part of collective liberation. That is to say, the pursuits and imaginings of individuals have the power to influence not only the material conditions of the collective as a whole but also, on the interpersonal level, the hopes and aspirations of other individuals in a given society. In this vein, the various acts of disbelonging I outline in this project fall into all five of these phases, but especially the dreaming phase. Laenui argues that "this phase is the most crucial for decolonization. Here is where the full panorama of possibilities are expressed, considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flooring for the creation of a new social order."[78] *Transatlantic Disbelonging* moves us beyond a preoccupation with how women artists simply represent the trauma of loss and displacement, and considers the ways willed and unwilled—or reluctant—migration are experienced not only as trauma but also as possibility.

Chapter Overview

Each of the chapters in *Transatlantic Disbelonging* offers a different example of how disbelonging has been taken up and used by Nigerian diasporic women artists. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of artists doing this work,

I point to the work of these groundbreaking contemporary artists as rich and productive examples for thinking through the many uses and manifestations of disbelonging as a strategy and viewpoint. These artists were early to the scene of experimental Nigerian diasporic art, and they have been at the forefront of many of the shifts that have opened the doors for many more women artists to follow.

Chapter 1 examines the problem of return and belonging in the visual and performance art of Wura-Natasha Ogunji. Looking to Ogunji's mixed-media drawings and video work between 2007 and 2010, as well as her 2012 series *Mo gbo mo branch*, I analyze how Ogunji navigates Lagos as a mixed-race American national. I argue that her refusal to be denied belonging while in Lagos and "crashing the party"—or "going" despite not being explicitly invited—disrupts easy understandings of belonging, citizenship, and cultural ownership. Utilizing visual analysis and interviews with Ogunji, this chapter contends that Ogunji's unruly return embodies and represents how return operates as a state of continuous experimentation, problem solving, (re)imagining, and homemaking for black women, not only in Nigeria but across the African diaspora.

In chapters 2 and 3, I shift to a discussion of physical intimacy and the erotic in diasporic women's art. Chapter 2 explores representations of domestic intimacy in the paintings of Njideka Akunyili Crosby. I argue that her works challenge hegemonic discourses about respectable Nigerian womanhood and the responsibility that women have for the transference of cultural heritage. It also position her partnership as identifiably heterosexual and oriented toward both past and future understandings of family despite its deviation from Nigerian social norms. This chapter resists positioning her interracial relationship as an escape from the burdens placed on her as a Nigerian woman. Instead, I consider how her early paintings are sites of messy contradiction, where her deep love for her husband exists alongside histories of colonialism and her internalized Americentrism, which she acknowledges have also played a role in shaping her desires. In chapter 3, I look at the role of the erotic in the study of Nigerian diasporic women, as illustrated by two of Zina Saro-Wiwa's video works: *Sarogua Mourning* and her 2012–13 documentary project and video installation *Eaten by the Heart*. This chapter argues that Saro-Wiwa's work pushes the viewers past shame and repression to embrace vulnerability. Moreover, it argues that her embrace of the documentary style moves her project beyond the realm of the aesthetic into the creation of fleeting affective diasporic communities that converge in her video art. In this chapter I introduce the idea of "affective diasporic communities"—communities built on emotional sharing and connection—and offer another example of alternative kinship networks in art.

In chapter 4, "Queer Diasporic Girlhood in *The Adventures of Ada the Alien* and *Akata Witch*," I attempt my own worldbuilding, examining the work of visual artist ruby onyinyechi amanze and novelist Nnedi Okorafor. I look at two black girl figures: "ada the Alien"—a reoccurring character in amanze's drawings, inspired by her experiences moving through Nigeria—and "Sunny," a black American-born girl with albinism, living in Nigeria, who is the protagonist in Okorafor's novel *Akata Witch*. I argue that the worlds that ada and Sunny move through and their identities as black girls offer a productive framework for thinking about diasporic outsiderness, disbelonging, and the possibility of creating new worlds to belong to, through the frames of leisure, play, and queer social bonds. This chapter identifies speculative investigations of black girlhood as a site for diasporic black girls and women to reclaim play, creativity, and leisure as valuable and necessary for visioning liberatory futures. While it might seem unexpected to turn to literature in this chapter, including a discussion of young adult diasporic literature in a chapter centered around girlhood allows me to delve into the applicability of disbelonging in alternate mediums and for young people.

In the conclusion, I look to the work of the newest generation of contemporary Nigerian diasporic women creators embracing disbelonging on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and I explore how the work of Ogunji, Akunyili Crosby, Saro-Wiwa, amanze, and Okorafor has already helped shift the creative landscape. Using a variety of creative mediums, the artists in *Transatlantic Disbelonging* render their own spaces of belonging, which are also sites of pleasure, freedom, play, and discovery. It is through these powerful acts of diasporic homemaking that these women demonstrate the powerful potential of art to craft alternatives to the type of belonging that often feels just out of reach for diasporic subjects. Disbelonging as an analytical lens highlights the many ways citizenship and nation are enacted onto and through the bodies of diasporic women and illuminates the creative methods women makers use to resist erasure and radically reimagine home and community for themselves and future generations.

Disbelonging is a strategy for our collective survival. This book maintains that embracing disbelonging offers opportunities for African diasporic women to acknowledge and act on embodied desires, wants, and messy contradictions. So often, we as African and African-descendant women are taught that cultural belonging is conditional, that even one slip-up may call one's entire identity into question. This looks like Akunyili Crosby struggling with the fear that marrying her husband will render her "not Igbo," or Okorafor's protagonist Sunny being called "akata" by her classmates. The repercussions of this type of

relationship to the places that we consider home can be grave. When African diasporic women accept the fact that, in order to receive love, protection, and acceptance, we must present only certain parts of ourselves or internalize the beliefs of governments, schools, and religious institutions, it is too easy to carry this assumption into all of our relationships. It conditions us to accept relationships where care and acceptance are bound by rules, regulations, and policing, and it teaches us that belonging can be experienced only alongside small and large violences targeted at us or others. I argue that we do not have to accept that conditional belonging is all there is. A diasporic sensibility that allows for disbelonging is not only necessary but critical for our survival.

Notes

INTRODUCTION. DISBELONGING: A STRATEGY FOR OUR COLLECTIVE SURVIVAL

1. Also written *dis-belonging* and *(dis)belonging*.

2. Brown, "Listening to the Land/Playing Off the Crowd."

3. Bedoya, "Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-Belonging."

4. An exciting departure from the tendency to understand disbelonging and unbelonging as an imposed position is the work of Iván A. Ramos, who, in *Unbelonging: Inauthentic Sounds in Mexican and Latinx Aesthetics*, employs *unbelonging* to discuss how Latinx artists use discordant sounds of punk metal and rock to embrace alienation and create new spaces where they can embrace their existence outside of the mainstream (5). Ramos describes unbelonging as "a strategy of rejection used by those who have already been rejected, a tactic expressed by rejects" (21).

5. Ellis, *Territories of the Soul*, 6.

6. Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 202.

7. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 4.

8. Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 16.

9. Gopinath writes, "I use the notion of 'impossibility' as a way of signaling the unthinkability of a queer female subject position within various mappings of nation and diaspora." Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 15.

10. Campt, *Image Matters*, 52.

11. Macharia, "Africa: Queer: Anthropology."

12. Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 5.

13. Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 128.

14. Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, vii.

15. Bauman, *Community*, 4.

16. Stack, *Call to Home*, 18.

17. Rowley, "'It Could Have Been Me' Really," 527.

18. Examples of these narratives include Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, and Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*.

19. I use quotes here to point to the many nontransatlantic journeys African subjects living on the continent make—migrations that are often left out of conversations about diaspora, migration, and exile.

20. Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 6–7.

21. Similarly, in *Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance*, Faedra Carpenter calls for a shift toward considering artist intention, writing, "The inclusion of artists' voices is a valuable element in this study and, moreover, their perspectives help keep us mindful of the importance in acknowledging artistic intention when analyzing audience reception or formulating scholarly opinions. Well known is the fact that creators cannot ensure how audience members will receive any, single message. This is in part the wonder and frustration of art; the impact and meaning of its reception is shaped by its audience as well as its devisers. Quite often, however, our focus is placed on a spectator's judgment with relatively little attention paid to the art maker's vision." Carpenter, *Coloring Whiteness*, 14.

22. Smith, *Enacting Others*, 23.

23. Ater, *Remaking Race and History*, 6.

24. Machida, *Unsettled Visions,* 9.

25. Ater, *Remaking Race and History*, 6.

26. Conquergood, "Performance Studies," 149.

27. Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," 828.

28. A "bid for connection," coined by John Gottman and Julie Gottman, describes attempts to gain attention, affection, or acceptance.

29. Weheliye, "My Volk to Come," 62.

30. Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora."

31. Shepperson, "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora," 46.

32. Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," 54.

33. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 51.

34. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235.

35. Okpewho and Nzegwu, *The New African Diaspora*, 5.

36. Okpewho and Nzegwu, *The New African Diaspora*, 6.

37. Gopinath, "Archive, Affect, and the Everyday," 166.

38. Bhabha. "The World and the Home."

39. Wilderson, "Grammar and Ghosts," 122.

40. Imoagene, *Beyond Expectations*, 29.

41. Kebede, "The African Second Generation in the United States," 128.

42. Kebede, "The African Second Generation in the United States," 130.

43. Kebede, "The African Second Generation in the United States," 120.

44. Chacko, "Fitting In and Standing Out," 229.

45. Chacko, "Fitting In and Standing Out," 233.

46. Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 17.

47. Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 9.

48. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners*, vii.

49. Coritz "Over Half of Those Who Reported Their Race as Black or African American Identified as African American, Jamaican or Haitian."

50. "Sub-Saharan African Immigrants in the United States."

51. Castellote and Okwuosa, "Lagos Art World," 183.

52. In Nigerian contexts these individuals may also colloquially be referred to as "IJGBs," which stands for "I Just Got Back."

53. Adjepong, *Afropolitan Projects,* 3–4.

54. Adjepong, *Afropolitan Projects*, 4.

55. Adjepong, *Afropolitan Projects*, 4.

56. Adjepong, *Afropolitan Projects*, 5.

57. Wemega-Kwawu, "The Politics of Exclusion."

58. Tsing, *Friction*, 4.

59. Tsing, *Friction*, 6.

60. Macharia, *Frottage*, 5.

61. Castellote and Okwuosa, "Lagos Art World," 187.

62. Castellote and Okwuosa, "Lagos Art World," 187.

63. hooks, *Art on My Mind*, xiii.

64. Clifford, "Diasporas," 313.

65. Nketiah's essay builds on the work of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, who coined the phrase "politics of respectability." Though Higginbotham discusses respectability politics specifically as it related to the work of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church during the Progressive Era, the emphasis on "sexual conduct, cleanliness, temperance, hard work, and politeness" mirrors the white supremacist colonial logics of respectability that are still emphasized on the African continent today. Still, I intentionally pull away from using "respectability politics," which has a history specifically rooted in the United States.

66. Nketiah, "Why Respectability Politics Is Failing African Women and Girls."

67. Nketiah, "Why Respectability Politics Is Failing African Women and Girls."

68. Van Dyke, *Everyday Narcissism*. Moreover, while not specifically about the African diaspora, Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory—the deep connection of second generations to traumatic experiences that preceded their birth—Cathy Schlund-Vial's engagement with traumatic memory among 1.5-generation Cambodian artists, and Machida's work on second- and third-generation Japanese American artists writing about internment have greatly influenced my work and research questions. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 33.

69. Herman, "Complex PTSD," 377.

70. Herman, "Complex PTSD," 378.

71. Gqola, *Female Fear Factory*, 18.

72. Ezepue and Nwafor, "October 1," 1.

73. Ezepue and Nwafor, "October 1," 3.

74. Ezepue and Nwafor, "October 1," 2.

75. Njenga, "Trauma in African Women and Children," 28.

76. Biggs, *Healing Stage*, 22.

77. Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization."

78. Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization," 4.