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# Migration and Literature: A Comparative Study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri in Digital Humanities

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of migration on the publishing timelines, thematic focus, awards, and translations of Nigerian diaspora writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri. Employing a mixed-method approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses, the research explores how migration influences their literary journeys and expands the global reach of Nigerian literature. Utilizing digital humanities tools such as KnightLab's TimelineJS, Flourish, and Google Sheets, the study visualizes data from reputable sources like Amazon and Goodreads to analyze each author's international achievements. Findings indicate that migration significantly shapes Adichie's and Okri's thematic explorations, addressing complex issues of identity, race, and cultural belonging. This research demonstrates how digital visualization offers insights into the intersection of migration and literary success, illustrating how these authors navigate and portray diasporic identities. Ultimately, the study contributes to African literary studies by highlighting the role of migration in enhancing the global influence and thematic depth of Nigerian literature.

**Keywords** : Migration, Nigerian Diaspora, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ben Okri, Digital Humanities, Comparative Literature, Visualization



## Résumé

Cette étude examine l'impact de la migration sur les calendriers de publication, les axes thématiques, les distinctions littéraires et les traductions des écrivains de la diaspora nigérienne Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie et Ben Okri. En adoptant une approche mixte intégrant des analyses qualitatives et quantitatives, la recherche explore comment la migration influence leurs parcours littéraires et élargit la portée mondiale de la littérature nigérienne. En utilisant des outils des humanités numériques tels que TimelineJS de KnightLab, Flourish et Google Sheets, l'étude visualise des données issues de sources fiables comme Amazon et Goodreads pour analyser les accomplissements internationaux de chaque auteur. Les résultats montrent que la migration façonne de manière significative les explorations thématiques d'Adichie et d'Okri, en abordant des questions complexes liées à l'identité, à la race et à l'appartenance culturelle. Cette recherche met en évidence la manière dont la visualisation numérique permet de mieux comprendre l'intersection entre migration et succès littéraire, illustrant comment ces auteurs naviguent et représentent les identités diasporiques. En fin de compte, l'étude apporte une contribution aux études littéraires africaines en soulignant le rôle de la migration dans le renforcement de l'influence mondiale et de la profondeur thématique de la littérature nigérienne.

**Mots-clés** : Migration, Diaspora nigérienne, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ben Okri, Humanités numériques, Littérature comparée, Visualisation

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the nation became a prominent center for African literary talent, exemplified by authors like Wole Soyinka, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, and Chinua Achebe, celebrated for *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which critiques post-independence Nigerian politics. Despite Nigeria's rich cultural landscape, many emerging writers sought international networks, moving abroad to sustain their careers. This migration shaped their literary journeys and led to increased recognition both within and outside Nigeria.

The renowned Nigerian author Okey Ndibe highlights Nigeria's rich literary heritage, referencing iconic figures such as Usman dan Fodio's daughter, Nana Asma, Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe, and Buchi Emecheta (Rebekah 28). In the early 2000s, authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helon Habila contributed to a resurgence in Nigerian literature, achieving global recognition with works such as Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). According to critics Pius

Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, this new generation of Nigerian writers has experienced "near-instant canonization," largely due to their ability to navigate international literary spaces (Adesanmi & Dunton 11). Central to their success is the diasporic experience, which allows authors like Adichie and Okri to engage with complex issues of identity, race, and nationality. These themes not only resonate with global audiences but also contribute to a revival and reinvention of Nigerian literature.

However, despite the increased visibility of Nigerian diaspora authors, significant gaps exist in understanding how migration influences their creative trajectories, global reach, and thematic choices. Historically, Nigerian authors have faced challenges within the local publishing industry, including inadequate infrastructure and restrictive market dynamics. These barriers often push authors to seek Western publishing avenues, raising critical questions about how such migration shapes their narratives and impacts their representation of Nigerian identity. This gap in the literature underscores the need for innovative methodologies to systematically examine the intersections of migration, literary success, and thematic evolution.

In addressing this gap, Opeibi projected that digital humanities (DH) would emerge as a transformative field, employing cultural, social, and technological approaches to study literature. DH tools such as data visualization and computational analysis offer innovative frameworks for examining the publishing timelines, translations, and awards of diaspora authors, revealing patterns that might otherwise remain hidden (Opeibi 165). By leveraging these tools, this study aligns with Opeibi's declaration and seeks to provide new insights into how migration influences the creative and professional trajectories of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri. Through this approach, the research not only addresses the absence of systematic analysis in this domain but also establishes a replicable model for exploring the broader implications of migration on African literature.

### **1.1. Migration, Publishing, and the Diaspora Experience of Nigerian Writers**

Ayodeji revealed that migration has offered Nigerian authors, particularly diaspora writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, greater access to global audiences through Western publishing platforms (Ayodeji 75). Through their experiences in the diaspora, Adichie's and Okri's works, such as *Americanah* and *The Famished Road*, have garnered significant attention, translated into multiple languages, and widely distributed, showcasing the broad appeal of Nigerian narratives on the global stage. Hewett further affirmed that these writers' works are lauded for tackling themes of identity, race, and belonging—central concerns shaped by the diasporic experience (Hewett 82). These narratives explore Nigerian culture from both local and international perspectives, bridging Nigerian and global experiences.

Historically, Nigerian authors have faced significant barriers within the local publishing industry, where restrictive political climates, limited infrastructure, and high production costs stymie fiction publications. As a result, Nigerian

bookstores have typically focused on educational and religious texts over literary works. Even accomplished writers residing in Nigeria often seek foreign agents or publishers to gain a wider audience, reinforcing a dependency on Western publishing avenues to secure international visibility (Ezema and Ajeluorou). This reliance, while essential for reach, raises important questions about how these external publishing influences might shape Nigerian literary narratives to cater to foreign audiences, potentially altering authentic representations of Nigerian culture and perspectives.

The theme of migration itself is not new to Nigerian literature. Earlier authors, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Buchi Emecheta, often depicted characters returning to Nigeria with Western education, eager to contribute to the nation's progress. These "been-to" narratives capture characters grappling with identity as they attempt to reintegrate into the Nigerian society post-migration (Egbunike, 210; Ibukun; and Raphael).

Furthermore, this exploration of diaspora life and identity is complemented by the adoption of digital humanities (DH) methods, which not only enhance our understanding of contemporary Nigerian literature but also facilitate a deeper analysis of the authors' transnational experiences. As such, both Adichie and Okri illustrate how migration complicates notions of cultural belonging while simultaneously benefiting from the tools provided by DH to visualize their publishing timelines, translations, and international recognition. Thus, the interplay between migration and digital methodologies enriches our comprehension of the complexities inherent in sustained diaspora life. This study illustrates how the migratory paths of Adichie and Okri have influenced their thematic focus, style, and narrative reach. By mapping out the evolution of their works and achievements, the research reveals how migration has not only broadened the scope of Nigerian literature but also positioned it within a global literary dialogue. Ultimately, this comparative digital analysis enriches the understanding of Nigerian literature's transformative role in a globalized world, where

diasporic voices continue to shape narratives around culture, identity, and transnational belonging.

## 1.2. Selected Nigerian Diaspora Writers for the Research

Nigerian diaspora writers have played a pivotal role in shaping the global perception of Nigerian literature. Among them, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri stand out for their contributions to postcolonial and contemporary literature. These authors, residing primarily outside Nigeria, explore complex themes of identity, race, and cultural belonging while earning international acclaim. Their diasporic experiences and global achievements make them ideal representatives for examining the interplay between migration and literary success.

1. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, celebrated for her novels and nonfiction, immigrated to the U.S. at 19. She has consistently been recognized as one of the most influential African writers, named among New African magazine's Top 100 Most Influential Africans in 2019. In 2017, she became the second Nigerian elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her notable works include *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), and *Americanah* (2013), which have been translated into multiple languages and widely acclaimed for their thematic depth and cultural resonance.
2. **Ben Okri**, a Nigerian poet and novelist born in Minna in 1959, moved to England in 1978. As a prominent figure in postmodern and postcolonial literature, Okri is often compared to Salman Rushdie. His novel *The Famished Road* (1991), which won the Booker Prize, and the Commonwealth Authors Prize (1987), has cemented his place in global literary history. His works, infused with magical realism and diasporic insights, have been translated into several

languages, further amplifying their international appeal.

The selection of these writers is informed by their global prominence and their unique ability to bridge Nigerian and international literary landscapes. Shercliff conducted a poll in the UK publishing sector asking respondents to name Nigerian authors. While Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Wole Soyinka, and Buchi Emecheta were frequently mentioned, Ben Okri's name was notably absent, despite his international achievements and residence in the West (Shercliff 16). This omission highlights the complexities surrounding the recognition of Nigerian diaspora authors and underscores the need for research that contextualizes their contributions and migratory experiences.

Both Adichie and Okri exemplify how migration shapes thematic focus, narrative strategies, and global reach. This study focuses on their literary achievements to explore how migration influences the broader trajectory of Nigerian literature and its reception in the global arena.

## 2.0. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The international success of Nigerian literature, particularly for authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, often depends on opportunities found outside Nigeria. Migration allows these writers to access the resources, publishers, and audiences necessary for global reach, yet raises questions about how this impacts their narratives and representations of Nigerian identity (Adesanmi and Dunton 11; Ezema). While earlier works explored "been-to" experiences of returning home, contemporary literature often delves into the complexities of sustained diaspora (Egbunike 211; Awelewa 101).

Despite this significance, limited research has examined how migration shapes the achievements of Nigerian diaspora authors or utilized digital humanities (DH) tools to visualize their timelines, awards, and global impact. Few studies provide comparative analyses of such authors' publishing journeys, particularly through DH methods, which

remain underutilized in African literary studies (Opeibi 162). This study fills these gaps by applying DH tools to

sampling technique was used to select two authors, Ben Okri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the authors and novels chosen for this study satisfy

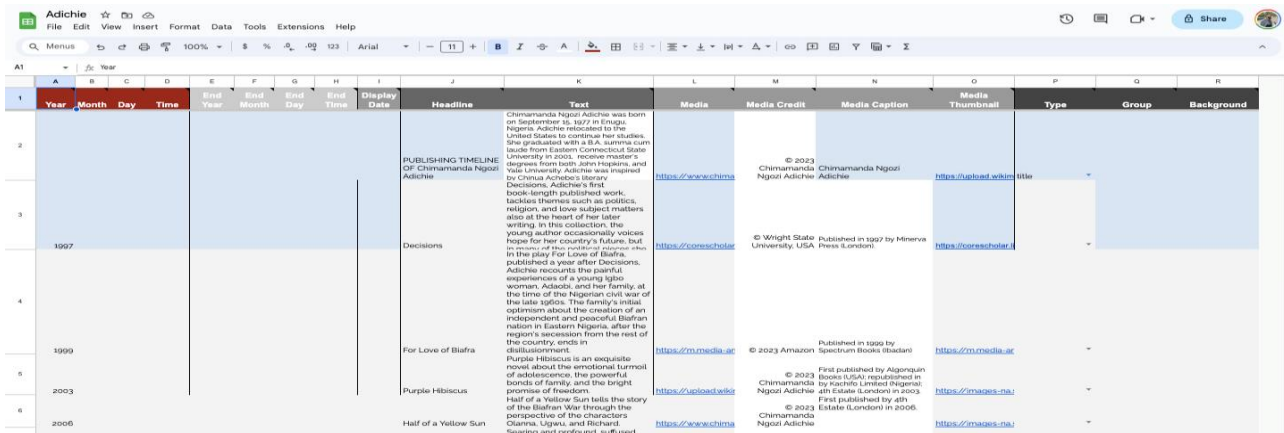


Figure 1: Google Sheet showing the authors' timeline © 2023 *Nig-EWriters by John Henry* used in creating the entries for the KnightLab Timeline for the selected authors.

analyse and visualise the success trajectories of Adichie and Okri, offering new insights into the role of migration in shaping Nigerian literature's global influence.

### 3.0. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this study is to compare the works of the selected diaspora writers with the intention of providing visualized data that will provide answers to the following research questions: In this context, the objectives of this research will help provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the publishing timelines, awards, and translations of the selected diaspora authors?
2. How has migration impacted their writing and publishing journey?

### 4.0. METHODOLOGY

A mixed research method was used for this investigation, as it is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. A simple random

Griswold's very broad definition of the Nigerian novel, which is "fiction of sixty or more pages, intended for adults or near-adults, and written in English by someone born in or a permanent resident of Nigeria" (Griswold 522). The important difference is that this study will focus on the writing of Nigerian emigrants. This study focuses on the fiction created by Nigerian writers in the diaspora because the majority of their widely read novels are published in Europe and the United States. Various free information technology-mediated digital humanities tools (WordPress, KnightLab, Flourish, and Google spreadsheets) will be used to visualise potential network analyses and similarities among the author's timelines, awards, translations, and publishing journeys.

Data for this study were gathered from reputable websites such as Amazon Books, Goodreads, and Wikipedia, as well as the official websites of the selected writers, as well as the websites of selected book publishers. This data was populated on a Google Excel sheet provided by the DH platforms.

### 5.0. RESULTS

KnightLab (TimelineJS, Storyline, and StoryMapJS) was utilised for the visualisation of

the data because it is a free source user-friendly interface that is simple to use without extensive technical skills. Another significant reason KingLab was chosen is that it allows the importation of data from a variety of sources, including Google Sheets and other spreadsheet apps, making it simple to update and manage for visualisations.

### 5.1. Research Question 1: What are the publishing timelines, awards, and translations of the selected diaspora authors?



Figure 2: Image showing the publishing timelines, awards, and translations of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri were analyzed using digital humanities tools such as KnightLab's TimelineJS and StorylineJS, which revealed significant patterns in their literary trajectories. Visualization of their publishing timelines showed that both authors began their careers in Nigeria, with Adichie's *Decision* (1997) and Okri's *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) marking their early entries into literature. However, their migration to the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively, marked a turning point, as their subsequent works were published by prominent Western publishers. Adichie's novels, including *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, were published by Alfred A. Knopf, while Okri's *The Famished Road* and *The Last Gift of the Master's Artist* were published by Penguin Random House. These visualizations highlight how migration facilitated access to global publishing platforms, enabling broader distribution and international recognition. recent novel was published by Alfred A. Knopf in New York City, U.S. While Okri's recent novel is also published by Penguin Random House in the USA as well. © 2023 [Nig-EWriters by John Henry](#)



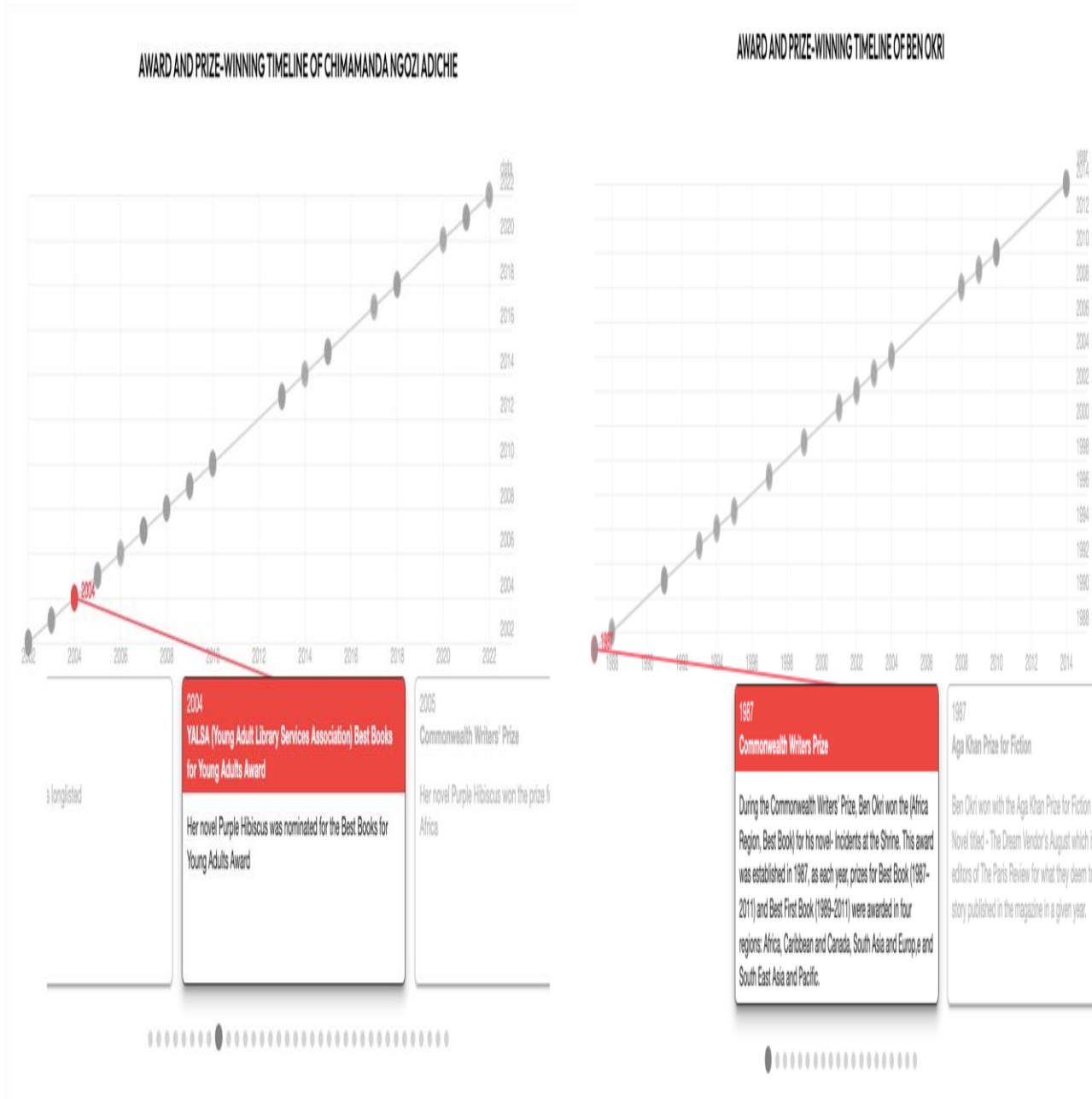


Figure 3: Image showing information from the authors' official websites, Goodreads, Amazon, and Wikipedia about the awards, prizes earned, nominated novels, prize titles, and the year they were granted. KnightLab- StorylineJS was used as the visualisation tool, and a Google sheet template was provided to fill in the data before the results were generated automatically. © 2023 *Nig-EWriters* by John Henry



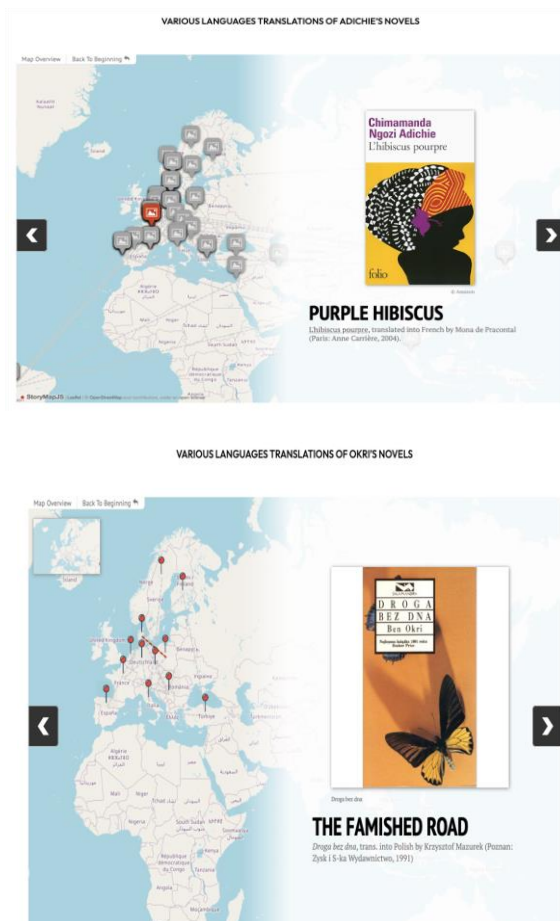


Figure 4: Figure 6: This image illustrates the translations of these authors' novels into various languages. The information was sourced from the authors' official websites, Goodreads, Amazon, and the [CEREP DH project](#) led by Daria Tunca at the University of Liège. *KnightLab's StoryMapJS* served as the visualisation tool, and the results were automatically generated after populating a Google Sheet template with the data.

## 5.2. Research Question 2: How has migration impacted their writing and publishing journey?

Migration profoundly impacts the writing and publishing journeys of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, shaping their thematic concerns, narrative aesthetics, and access to global publishing platforms. Relocation has enabled these writers to draw on their diasporic experiences, resulting in works that resonate with diverse audiences and address complex themes of identity, race, and belonging. Additionally, their affiliation with Western publishers has expanded their global reach, offering platforms that ensure wider recognition and distribution.

### 5.2.1. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Adichie's migration to the United States at 19 significantly influenced her literary trajectory, providing access to educational opportunities and publishing networks that shaped her narrative style and thematic focus. Her novels reflect a synthesis of her Nigerian heritage and her diasporic experiences, enabling her to engage with global issues while preserving the authenticity of Nigerian culture.

1. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003): Adichie's debut novel, published by Algonquin Books (U.S.), reflects her diasporic lens while exploring themes of familial conflict, religious extremism, and the quest for freedom. Written during her studies at Johns Hopkins University, the novel won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book and was translated into multiple languages, including French, German, and Spanish, broadening its accessibility and appeal.
2. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006): Published by Knopf (U.S.), this novel examines the Nigerian Civil War through a diasporic perspective. Adichie's fellowship at Princeton University provided the intellectual and creative space to explore war's effects on identity and relationships. The book's translations into Portuguese, Chinese, and Dutch, among others,

underscore its global impact, while its awards, including the Orange Prize for Fiction, reflect its critical acclaim.

3. *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009): This collection of short stories, also published by Knopf, delves into themes of cultural clash and identity negotiation, deeply influenced by Adichie's bicultural experiences. Its success, marked by the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, highlights the universal relevance of her diasporic narratives.
4. *Americanah* (2013): Published by Knopf and Fourth Estate (U.K.), *Americanah* explores race, migration, and the challenges of belonging. Drawing on her transnational experiences, Adichie crafts a narrative that critiques social constructs while deepening her engagement with global audiences. The novel's translation into numerous languages and its inclusion in literary curricula worldwide reflect its enduring influence.

### 5.2.2. Ben Okri

Ben Okri's migration to England at 19 positioned him within global literary networks that shaped his ideological and aesthetic sensibilities. His works, rooted in magical realism and informed by his diasporic outlook, address themes of spiritual resilience, cultural hybridity, and the transformative power of storytelling.

1. *Flowers and Shadows* (1980): Okri's debut, published by Longman (Nigeria and U.K.), reflects his early diasporic perspective, exploring themes of corruption and societal decay. Its translations into French and German marked the beginning of his international literary journey.
2. *The Famished Road* (1991): Published by Jonathan Cape (U.K.), this Booker Prize-winning novel exemplifies Okri's signature magical realism. Migration broadened his access to Western literary traditions, enabling him to craft a narrative that bridges Nigerian folklore with universal human struggles. Translated into over 20

languages, the novel solidified his status as a global literary figure.

3. *Infinite Riches* (1998): Published by Phoenix House (U.K.), this novel blends Okri's Nigerian roots with broader global themes, reflecting his diasporic identity. Its translations into French and Italian demonstrate its cross-cultural resonance.
4. *Dangerous Love* (1996): Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson (U.K.), this urban narrative reflects Okri's evolving engagement with diasporic themes of alienation and self-discovery. Its translations into Spanish, German, and Dutch further highlight the global appeal of his diasporic voice.

Through their affiliation with major international publishers such as Knopf, Algonquin Books, and Jonathan Cape, Adichie and Okri have gained global platforms that amplify their voices. Migration has not only influenced their thematic preoccupations—addressing identity, belonging, and transnational experiences—but has also shaped their narrative styles, blending Nigerian traditions with broader literary movements. By navigating these dual spaces, Adichie and Okri exemplify how diaspora enriches literary production, enabling Nigerian literature to engage in global dialogues and reach diverse audiences. This underscores migration's pivotal role in transforming their creative and professional trajectories.

## 6.0. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study offers a nuanced exploration of the publishing timelines, awards, and translations of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, leveraging digital humanities (DH) tools such as KnightLab's TimelineJS and StoryMapJS. The visualizations generated by these tools go beyond mere representation; they reveal hidden patterns and validate the profound influence of migration on these authors' literary trajectories.

Mapping the publishing timelines through TimelineJS revealed distinct trends in Adichie's

and Okri's careers. Both authors began publishing their initial works in Nigeria (*Decision*, 1997, and *Flowers and Shadows*, 1980, respectively), but their subsequent relocations to the United States and the United Kingdom marked a significant shift in their publishing dynamics. Post-migration, Adichie collaborated with prominent American publishers like Alfred A. Knopf for works such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, while Okri partnered with Penguin Random House for *The Famished Road* and *The Last Gift of the Master's Artist*. This shift highlights the critical role of migration in providing access to global publishing platforms, facilitating wider distribution, and elevating the visibility of Nigerian narratives in international literary spaces.

The visualizations of award timelines using StorylineJS further underscore the impact of migration on their global recognition. Adichie's Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *Purple Hibiscus* and Okri's Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* reflect how diasporic platforms amplify opportunities for Nigerian writers. These awards not only affirm the literary merit of their works but also draw attention to the thematic depth and universal resonance of Nigerian literature, as shaped by their diasporic perspectives.

The translation analysis visualized through Flourish provides additional insights into their global reach. Both authors' works have been translated into over 20 languages, including French, German, and Spanish, demonstrating how migration positions Nigerian literature within a global cultural dialogue. This breadth of translation underscores the accessibility and adaptability of their narratives across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes, validating the role of migration in broadening the reception of Nigerian literature.

The findings corroborate Opeibi's assertion that DH tools facilitate layered insights into complex literary phenomena. By visualizing these data points, the study discerns patterns in publishing timelines, awards, and translations that might otherwise remain obscured (Opeibi 163). These patterns affirm that migration is not merely a background

factor but a transformative force that enhances the international resonance of Nigerian literature.

The discursive role of DH tools in this research lies in their ability to integrate textual and contextual analyses, offering a comprehensive understanding of the trajectories of Adichie and Okri. Through these tools, the study provides a replicable model for analyzing the intersections of migration and literature, contributing significantly to African literary studies and digital humanities discourse.

## 7.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

The contributions of Nigerian diaspora writers, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, continue to shape both Nigerian literature and its international appeal. To further promote and enhance the impact of diaspora writers, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Establishing platforms that connect Nigerian diaspora writers with writers in Nigeria could foster productive exchanges. These networks could support mentorship, shared publishing resources, and collaborative projects, strengthening bonds within the literary community and promoting a unified Nigerian literary identity.
2. Encouraging Nigerian diaspora authors to participate actively in global literary festivals, translation initiatives, and other international platforms could increase the visibility of Nigerian literature. Translating Nigerian works into more languages and facilitating dialogue at global events can help extend the reach and appreciation of Nigerian literary culture worldwide.
3. Recognizing the achievements of Nigerian diaspora authors through awards and honours specific to their contributions can inspire emerging writers and reinforce pride in Nigerian literary heritage. Such awards can highlight the cultural significance of these works and encourage writers to maintain authentic representations of Nigerian narratives within global literature.

## 8.0. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of migration on the literary careers of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ben Okri, showcasing how it shapes their themes, narrative styles, and global reach. By using digital humanities tools such as TimelineJS and StoryMapJS, the research effectively charts their achievements and illustrates the role of migration in expanding Nigerian literature's influence. The findings reveal that migration not only provides access to wider publishing networks but also enriches the authors' exploration of identity, race, and belonging. Their diasporic experiences have deepened the cultural and thematic richness of their works, connecting Nigerian and global audiences. This research offers a replicable model for studying how migration influences literature and underscores the value of digital humanities in African literary studies. It reinforces the role of migration in fostering broader perspectives and enhancing the global standing of Nigerian literature.

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## DIGITAL TOOLS USED FOR DATA VISUALIZATION

1. Northwestern University Knight Lab- <https://knightlab.northwestern.edu/>
2. Daria Tunca's Digital Corpus - Center for Teaching and Research in Post-colonial Studies (CEREP) University of Liège- <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/bibliographies/>
3. John Henry's Nig-ewriters Coprus <https://nig-ewriters.rarebook-ubfc.fr/writers-journey/>

## AUTHORS' SHORT BIOS

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