Oluwadunni O. Talabi

WOMAN, AFRICAN, OTHER,

Black Feminism and Intersectionality in the Contemporary Works of African Diasporic Women

Oluwadunni O. Talabi
Woman, African, Other

Oluwadunni O. Talabi is a postdoctoral researcher at the North American and Post-colonial Chair, Universität Bremen, where her research focuses on Black diasporic commons, queer discourses of resistance, and narratives of alternative and ecocentric feminist futures. She completed her PhD in 2023 under the North American and Postcolonial Chair, Universität Bremen. In the Spring of 2022, she was a visiting researcher in residence at the African American and Black Diaspora Studies Department, Boston University Arts & Sciences, USA.

Oluwadunni O. Talabi

Woman, African, Other

Black Feminism and Intersectionality in the Contemporary Works of African
Diasporic Women

[transcript]

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at https://dnb.dnb.de

This book is for every Black woman who says NO MORE!

Contents

Acknowledgement

I could not have reached this moment in my academic career without the intellectual support and cordiality of my first advisor, Prof. Dr. Kerstin Knopf. Thank you for listening to my proposal in your office four years ago, immediately offering me an acceptance letter to submit at the *Ausländeramt*, and providing critical feedback on my work that got me my funding. Your crucial early support of this work and continuous mentorship brought me this far, and I am ever grateful. Also, I had the good luck to meet my second advisor, Prof. Dr. Priscilla Layne as I was nearing the end of my research work. Thank you for your enthusiasm, mentorship, and indispensable feedback. Because of you, my bookshelf is richer and my Black feminist knowledge deeper.

Research is never easy without funding. I am grateful for the financial support of the Evangelische Studienwerk Villigst. Thank you for the three years of financial support, for funding my summer school at Amsterdam, as well as my research stay at the African American Studies Department, Boston University, Massachusetts. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Kerstin Knopf and the University of Bremen for awarding me the four-month completion grant, as well as to the Bremen State and University Library for their partial funding support of this book publication.

To you Simon Väth, my husband, buddy, and the truest love of my life. This book is a finished book because of my grit, as it is because of your labor of love and versatility. I am eternally grateful for the absolute nurture and care through the writing phase. For the utopia we have created together, for holding me in softness, and for removing everyday obstacles from my path.

To my dad, Gabriel Talabi, whose vision and tenderness outlives him. I know what love and allyship should look like because of you. Thank you for giving me seventeen years. Thank you for being my first life and professional advisor. Thank you for instilling in me a sense of agency, autonomy, and quiet strength from childhood. For showing me that feedback in any form should be

treated as a recommendation. And that at the end of the day, the choice of what to consider and reject is mine alone.

A special and loud thank you to my mum, Grace Tutu. You have supported me in ways unimaginable. Thank you for your futuristic imagination. Thank you for your fierceness, audacities, and unwavering inclinations. Watching you from a young age speak back to the theatrics of power in a loud, clear, and unrelenting voice modeled to me a powerful way to exist in my body, even if we did not agree on everything. Thank you for performing gender in an aberrant way. You didn't need to know the word 'feminism' to raise me to take up space and to speak up. I am where I am and what I am today because of you.

To my siblings, Oluwasoga and Oluwagajuwa, my childhood stories are richer and funnier because of you. Thank you for the check-ins, for the applause across distance and for never standing in the way of my authenticity. To my cousin, Olugbemisola, your decision to study Germanistik and visit Germany for an exchange program not only changed your life but also paved the way for me to be here today. I cannot thank you enough.

To my best girl, Nkem, thank you for the steadfast belief in me long before any of this made sense, from the days of rambling on about Judith Butler even though you had absolutely no idea who I was talking about. You are a cheerleader every girl should hope to have as a friend. To my girlfriends, Ifunanya, Estelle, Bimbola, Olivia, thank you for the gift of community, for consistently showing up, and for the endless belly laughs amidst our fierce resistance against patriarchy. To Danny, thank you for your sociability and for consistently showing up.

To my friend, Oluseun Tanimomo, thank you for your wealth of knowledge, support and for answering my always-urgent messages. Your friendship means the world to me, and this dissertation is richer because of your congenial feedback.

And finally, my deepest thanks to all of the Black women and people of marginalized identities around the globe for whom I write with deep love and reflection. Your unrelenting activism, creativity, and subversion inspire my rebellion against the gender binary and continue to inspire my thoughts and actions. Our lives, intertwined and multifaceted, are the heartbeat of this dissertation.

Introduction: 'The Outsider Within'[1]—Intersection of Self-Reflexivity and Critical Research

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better." – Maya Angelou

My self-reflexive journey on gender hierarchy and its manifestations in cultural and state institutions began early in my life in Nigeria. Born and raised by middle-class educated parents who did not discriminate between me and my elder brother based on gender, my interaction outside of my family unit revealed to me early enough that my parents' ideology was neither a dominant nor a desirable one. From educational institutions, which I attended from Monday to Friday, to church services, which my family attended on Sunday, gendered oppositional and subordinating relational dynamics were exalted above every other dynamic. In my high school, the class 'monitor' position was reserved for boys and 'monitress' position reserved for girls, with 'monitress' deferring to monitor, and only assuming authority when the 'monitor' was unavailable. At church, Judeo-Christian biblical essentialist interpretations could not be more unequivocal. Men were the head; women were created from the ribs of men, and our primary duty was to serve as helpmates in subordination to men. We could have dreams, albeit conditional dreams that first needed to be filtered through a male-approved microscope before it could even be launched. My romantic relationships I developed at the university would also be caught up in the wheels of this hierarchical dynamic. The myriads of indigenous ungendered social roles and identities aside (Oyěwùmí 1997, 2016), there was always that sinister essentialist subordinate status that

---

1   There is an obvious nod in the title of my introduction to the influential term coined by Black feminist sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins in "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*" (1986).

followed every discussion of the woman's place in the contemporary Nigerian society. It was not lost on me that my self-definition as a woman and sub-jectivity in the public, male-dominant world was outside of my control, and the version of "bottom power"[2] I was granted was a fatalistic one. In many shared spaces, both men and women coexisted, yet the distribution of power was often skewed, with women frequently finding themselves marginalized or operating within a patriarchal system where their authority was subject to certain conditions and limitations. Needless to say, my first conflict between the personal and organized systems and claim to an 'outsider within' status was established.

My arrival to Germany in 2013 for my master's program stretched the boundaries of my self-reflexivity in relation to systems of domination. My experience of Otherness deepened, gaining additional layers and complexity. Gender hierarchy no longer exclusively involved two agential subjects—post-colonial Nigerian men and women. I realized race and racial constructs play a significant role in shaping perceptions and expectations regarding gender performance. Witnessing African men who used African culture and Judeo-Christian teachings to enforce the subordination of African women, turn around to revere white German women brought me into the consciousness of the mutability of gender. So many times, in intimate and non-intimate relationships with African men, I was labelled white for having a perception of self that was not subordinating to a man. This often sent me into a rage spiral. I watched African men perform their gender for white women in the way they refused to perform for African/Black women on cultural grounds. On the other hand, I was labelled uncultured for exhorting feminist tenets. I recall a specific incident when a Ghanaian male friend confronted me directly, accusing me of adopting attitudes of a white woman simply because I asserted my autonomy in matters of sexuality. In response, I promptly gathered my belongings and exited his apartment. That ended whatever budding friendship we had. In another encounter involving extended family members, a friend of my cousin in response to my displeasure about his unsolicited sexual comments on my body told me he had a white German wife at home, and I was too arrogant for a Black woman. The emphasis on white was quite telling. I could go on and on about incidents like these. For every African man I had to get into

---

2   Bottom power is a common Nigerian expression for the power wielded by women via their sexuality to manipulate men into doing our bidding. From a young age, we are taught that this is a powerful tool in our arsenal that we can use to get out needs met.

verbal trenches with, a piece of my sanity went with the clash. It was either expose myself to triggering sentiments repeatedly or avoid any Black/African gathering that included men I had not yet profiled, so I most often chose the latter. To say I was impacted by this would be an understatement. I came to the realization that once again, my identity (re)construction in relation to my new space was not as freeing I thought it would be. I was Othered in new, multifaceted ways I needed to find a language and theory for if I desired to rise above my disenfranchising situation.

   That gender performance and expectation really did mutate in relation to space was however all the motivation I needed to explore gender theory beyond essentialist dogmas. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory was a momentous discovery. It became a beacon of transformation. I had not just the reflexivity about myself in relation to systems of domination but also the critical tool to challenge gender essentialism. I found my creative outlet in writing short stories, poetry pieces and articles for blogs. Soon, I began to get invitations to remunerative student-organized poetry slams, mainly through personal references of friends who were delighted to read my pieces on social media platforms. My creative expressions centered around reflexivity on my gendered selves (past, unfolding present), paradoxical identity constructs, and the hetero-patriarchal system of domination. However, after a few productive slams, I decided to stop in spite of the recognition and acknowledgement that accompanied "risking my selves" in my poetry pieces (Sethi 2012, 88). While white individuals in attendance, especially women, came up to me to offer their sympathy for my gendered lived experience, some individuals often interjected unsettling and derogatory remarks about African men, leaving me deeply unnerved. Needless to say, I found myself confronted with further lessons on the complexities of intersectional colonial legacies. I was not sure what I was hoping to gain from allowing people into my world, but I was certain in the fact that I did not want this kind of sympathy. It ´was so glaring that white people's solidarity with my gendered experience was mired in their minimization of the African continent and racist assumptions of African men. In addition, when placed into the context of the fact that I was consistently the only student poet of African descent in attendance, this was even more so harmful. While centering my gendered selves in relation to these contradictory systems of dominance, I was also effectually exposing an already vulnerable and marginalized group to be further marginalized by the white German hegemony. My approach was lacking in nuance, lacking in an investigation of all Black genders and how the external systems of interlocking

power constantly operating in our social world engenders our subjection and subjectivity simultaneously.

Michelle M. Wright's essay "Others-from-within from without: Afro-German Subject Formation and the Challenge of a Counter-Discourse", is a relevant clarification of my convoluted frame of mind at that point in time. According to Wright, there is a uniqueness to the racist discourse and the Otherness of Black people in the German society that is quite different from the diverse array of representations in African American, Black British, and even Black French literature and theory, which in consequence, presents a complex challenge to the counter-discourses that have emerged within the German society. Wright argues that while racist discourse in Britain, the United States, and France with some variations, establish Black people as "Others from within—physically part of the nation, but in all other ways utterly foreign and thus utterly incapable of being integrated into that nation", Blackness in Germany, including Black-German people born and raised in Germany, are consistently imagined by white Germans as Others-from-Without, African Others and non-existent instead of antithetical to white German subjectivity as often juxtaposed in African American and British counter-discourse (2013, 297). The implication of this kind of imagination of Blackness for my creative participation as an African female migrant in the German social space, is that it only served to reinforce white German's simplified binary reduction "where all the Germans are white, and all the Blacks are African primitives", to be offered sympathy and saved from their barbarity (301). So, while it was not my intention to reproduce racialized dichotomies, unburdening and centering my paradoxical selves meant exposing Black men, who were also a big part of my many struggles, as well as many other racialized identities within the German society, to oppressive mechanisms mobilized by the white supremacist imperial structure omnipresent in the German society and beyond. I was from my own corner of the world contributing to the "processes of differentiation" deployed by the West in their theorizations of people of African descent (Heron 2006, 56). I was fostering an already existing white humanitarian narrative, as a result of which, the impact of my participation could not be erased by my honorable intention.

So, while I continued to interrogate the intricacies of my 'outsider within' status that my identity as a Black migrant woman conferred upon me and to spotlight the anomalies present in these taken-for-granted mainstream Afrocentric and feminist epistemes, I completely stopped accepting invitations to present my poetry pieces to a predominantly white student audience,

which meant I stopped doing poetry slams in totality because I lived in a predominantly white city. Notwithstanding this conundrum, I decided to investigate gender in the context of the Nigerian socio-culture in my master thesis. My master thesis entitled "'Silence is Complacence' – Rewriting the Nigerian Woman: Female Autonomy and Emancipation" in three novels by Nigerian women writers most certainly betrays my research objective. A short elaboration on my approach is however necessary for this self-reflexive introduction I have chosen to embark upon. Using feminist theories by Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Simone Beauvoir's second wave feminist theory of the woman as Other, I investigated the gender asymmetrical relations, sexist social norms and ingrained prejudices against female children in the Nigerian society that engender essentialist narratives, and how this social order is deconstructed and transcended by feminist female characters. Without consideration for the history of European colonialism and coloniality of power[3] that has persistently subordinated, erased, and disrupted the social institutions and outpouring of epistemes from African societies, I unthinkingly deployed Eurocentric theoretical models (Butler and Beauvoir) with the uncritical argument that race is a non-existent issue in postcolonial Nigeria, and all women, regardless of their race, still have to contend with a ubiquitous patriarchal social order. Despite acknowledging Black feminist thought on the paradoxical struggles of Afro-descended women, I quickly moved on to posit that my research objective was not preoccupied with differentiating between feminist perspectives. Rather, my preoccupation was to use literature to interrogate the dichotomy of gender and endogenous patriarchal social norms in the Nigerian society. My argument that theories do not matter as long as they are feminist in hindsight justifies Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's call-out of African elites, who raised in Western academy and entrenched in Western ways, fail to recognize that "African societies had their spiritual identities and distinct ways of thinking and organizing before European contest" (2016, 7). While my master's thesis thoroughly examined the processes through which heteronormative gender socialization is constructed, my bypassing of Black feminist, Afro-centered and anti-racist lenses meant a shortcoming in the deconstruction of gender in relation to space and time periods, and a discrep-

---

3   See Anibal Quijano Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America (2008), to understand how Europe through racialized colonial domination organized the standard of modernity around Eurocentric epistemology.

ancy in my imagined alternative realities of gender justice and liberation of African women from systems of domination.

I dare to begin my introductory chapter by telling my own story and struggle through epistemological paradigms for context, because I aim to show that I am not magically equipped with an objective epistemological lens, as should nobody attempting to work with socio-cultural biographies dare to claim. I dare to say that we are all implicated in the historical amnesia that justifies and at the same time excuses epistemological racialization, global hierarchy, and institutional domination. As Oyěwùmí rightly asserts that one of the hallmarks of modernity is a global hierarchy that positions Europe and North America over Africa, in such a way that learning is also one-directional with only Africans learning from the West and not vice-versa (6), one could certainly argue that my epistemological consciousness is also impacted by my agential subjugation. So, while I am committed to mapping Afro-descended women's experience of gender, it has been a journey to "[mastering] sociological paradigms" and finding a "powerful balance between the strengths of [my] sociological training and the offerings of [my] personal and cultural experiences" (Collins 1986, 29). Committing my research to exploring the lived experiences of women of African descent and our subjugated status within the globalized Westernized and patriarchal network of the Black Atlantic, I have chosen to focus on the contemporary works of African diasporic women that engage with the everyday lives of African women and their presence and participation in both local and global contexts particularly as these contexts organize around themselves to impact Black women. This relational approach allows me to examine things left unexamined in my poetry slams, blog posts, master thesis and all of my writings. It is also my way of bringing into contact self-reflexivity and versatile critical theories to explore the underpinnings of the simultaneous and paradoxical personal and cultural realities singularly lived by Black women in every corner of the world. Lastly, it is my way of moving beyond the nationalist and exclusionary pretext that often times follow contemporary investigation of Blackness and Black women's experiences. I argue that contemporary African diasporic women's literature entering into the global literary stage is a progressive departure from white-centered feminist literary frames and African male writings that have dominated liberational socio-politics and counter-discourses for a long time. Given my use of contemporary literature, the hasty conclusion that Black women writers just recently started intervening into transnational dialogues should however not be drawn. As Black feminist scholars have repeatedly pointed out,

Black women's contributions have suffered and continue to suffer erasure, co-optation, and omission from the liberational corpus on the global stage.

I draw inspiration from transnational and transatlantic Black and African feminist theories, amongst many other non-Black theories of power and oppression to reflect on the comprehensive interlocking structures that embed Black women's subjection and underpin our mistreatment and fatal neglect in the global society. I argue that Black women's re-imagination of the dialectic that inform subject formations extend beyond the realm of theoretical discourse. I hypothesize that African female diasporic writers, who have had a history and reputation of summoning critiques of hegemonic white and male-centered subject formation in their creative works, continue to tease out these nuances and fallacies, and problematize the experience of Otherness and kaleidoscope of oppression in their contemporary literary works. This experience of layers of Otherness; as women in the global sphere, as third world subjects and as women in our own endogenous African communities, I argue, provide the foundation for a common consciousness, stimulate our interest in dismantling the entangled system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy and ultimately facilitate the imagination of new liberatory futures and alternative realities. For a group whose legacy of oppression has eluded monologic narratives of colonial racism or heteropatriarchy, what themes are articulated reiteratively in our writings I assert is of paramount significance to the discourse on structures of power.

Because Black feminism coheres around Black women's socio-historical legacy of the struggle to survive simultaneously in both complementary and contradictory worlds defined by white supremacy and patriarchy, it has generated enthusiastic association and vivacious contributions from both Black women intellectuals and non-intellectuals. Recognizing the historical and contemporary multiple power structures shaping Black women's oppression means that Black feminist perspectives and approaches to discussing Black women's issues employ intersectionality as an analytic tool. The need to re-imagine new paradigms and theories has for instance led to the coining of misogynoir by two Black feminist scholars as a separate category from misogyny, to specifically address the intersection of misogyny and anti-Black racism experienced by Black women. This paradigm like much of the archive of black feminist theories also use intersectionality to understand the way in which overlapping marginalizations shape Black women's distinct experiences of misogyny. I use this concept of intersectionality repeatedly in my work to engage the appropriation of the Black women's body as a site for contradictory

narratives of empowerment and disempowerment and intricate modes of invisibility and hyper-visibility as represented in my selected texts. Speaking to how social structures alter Black women's experience of gender, one of the issues I interrogate is the intersectional characteristics of Black women's femicide as represented in my selected texts. Using Diana Russell's theory of femicide (2019), I advance an intersectional approach to Black women's experience of sexual violence and subsequent femicide in the texts. Recognizing the need to problematize and deconstruct the multiple layers of and most often competing power structures that inform violence committed against Black women, I demonstrate how the margin of Black women's femicide is fraught with contradictions strongly suggestive of misogynoir.

Finally, in my enduring examination of the intersectional complexities of Black women's struggles and the multiple contextual factors that inform and trouble our subjectivity and identity formation, I extend the dialogue on power and subject formation into the discursive terrain of psychoanalysis. Appropriating the work of Judith Butler, I argue that the agency of Black women is not only destabilized by multiple material power structures, but also that these material power structures assume psychic destabilizing effects as well. Considering the historical domination of people of African descent, the notion that Black women's oppression cannot be framed in terms of gender only is incontestable. However, my exploration of Black women's subordination extends beyond the externality of social structures. While it is an established fact that Frantz Fanon is one of the earliest Black thinkers who used psychoanalysis to draw conclusions about the lived reality of Black people, my choice to use Butler in my work, is premised on my preoccupation with the multilayered and intersectional oppression of Black women, which Fanon, as with many Black male nationalist thinkers, does not consider in their counter-discourses. Like Michelle Wright on her critique of Fanon's body of writing argues, "the failure to consider gender, like those theories of subjectivity that ignore race, is not simply an error of omission, an appendage that must now be fitted on to make their theories 'complete'. […] If gender is excluded, the critical results can only yield at best a partial, at worst a wildly erroneous, series of pronouncements on the formation of the subject in the African diaspora" (2004, 125–126). Although Butler is not a Black feminist theorist and does not claim to engage with Black women's lived reality as with majority of the theories I use in my work, their preoccupation with the coercive character of the normalizing discourse, not limited to race, gender and sexuality, that confer meaning on us,

makes it a better fit to draw conclusions specific to Black women's unique dis-enfranchisement.

Using Butler's work on psychic subjection, I argue that the hegemonic so-cial structure and legitimized power relations also assume a psychic character that fabricates the condition of our subject formation. If the subject is as much the effect of the signifying practices adopted by the exterior hegemonic sys-tem, I argue that these signifying practices have caused conceptual changes) to what might have been Black women's subjectivity. I argue that a certain priv-ilege of participating in the celebration and appreciation of the pre-reflexive layer of our original identities (available to white dominant culture) is already shattered by the psychic character of the interlocking forces of domination un-der which we are subjected. Building on Butler's theory of subjection, I explore the ways in and the extent to which the psychic form of power works in tandem with the punitive force of social processes to interpellate Black women as sub-jects, ensuring our compliance and participation in the terms of our discursive production. Complementarily, I aim to answer these questions: What distinc-tive structures of power and oppression do Black women writers identify and unmask in their texts? How are Black female characters constructed in domi-nant discourse and how do these constructions push Black female characters to the edges or peripheries within systems of power?? How are these power structures incorporated into Black women's literatures to affect their charac-ters' development? What structures of oppression are spotlighted when sto-ries are written to reflect the struggles of Black female characters? What affec-tive aesthetics are used in the texts to evoke Black women's lived and felt ex-perience of power and oppression and draw readers into the affective space of Black women's corporeality? What does liberation and alternative reality look like when it is addressed from Black female writers' standpoint?

Background of the Study: A Critique of Black Diasporic Thought —Paul Gilroy and Michelle M. Wright in Conversation

The systemic oppression of Black women in the West and our erasure within both Western intellectual tradition and African diasporic counter-discourses has been a central topic of debate in Black feminist literatures. For my mono-graph, which carefully explores the lived experiences of women of African descent and the social mechanisms that bring Black women to occupy the margins, I analyze six literary texts by African women writers across four

key genres—bildungsroman, literary realism, realistic fiction, and historical fiction—that explore the interconnected dimensions of the subjection of Black female subjects through historical periods, geopolitical contexts, and social divisions. I classify these six selected novels as African women's diasporic literatures because of their socio-historical location within wider global cultural oscillation, and their commitment to narrating the subjectivities and mobilizations of women of African descent beyond ethnic and national borders. It is worth noting that typology of any kind is most often not easy to reach in the field of sociology, or that the assumption of any socio-cultural unity is a detrimental one to make, and even when it is reached or assumed, one must approach provisionally, and be open to intra-group power differentials, tensions, and/or complexities.

Encircling my research questions and hypothesis with this cautionary foundation, I, for the justification of my research, establish my classification using Paul Gilroy's delineation of the Black diaspora in the seminal book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), and Michelle M. Wright's theoretical approach to Black subjectivity in the book *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004). In the Black Atlantic, Gilroy offers a compelling perspective on how Black intellectuals have utilized diverse cultural elements from Africa, the Caribbean, America, and Europe to construct a syncretic and transatlantic discourse, thereby rewriting their embeddedness with Western modernity and creating a Black Atlantic network. In effect, Black thinkers from Africa to America to the Caribbean and to Britain have had to engage in reflexive dialogues and offer inspiration to one another about the suffering of Black people and the violence that continues to shape Black life within "the processes of development and social and technological progress known as modernization", at the same time that they have had to acknowledge and explore the differentials in Black diasporic cultures, histories, systems and socio-politics (Gilroy 1993, 163).

As with so many theoretical formulations, especially one that attempts to map some form of conceptual connection and unity across social spaces, Gilroy's abstraction of Black transatlantic linkage has generated a number of critique and application. Michelle M. Wright is one of such intellectuals whose work has prominently engaged with diasporic collectivities, tensions and (dis)continuities. Building upon Gilroy's groundbreaking and enriching work, Wright theorizes a decolonial feminist understanding of Black diasporic consciousness, as that which must extend beyond the limitations of historical moments or cultural tropes, especially because there is not a single moment

or trope that connects all of the established diasporic communities (past and present). How does one recognize the diversity of Black subjectivities and at the same time coalesce this diversity into a Black diaspora is one of the central questions in Wright's book? Wright provides an answer by suggesting a theoretical methodology that can do two things: 1. Produce variety of discourses to counter a variety of specific Western theories that have been committed to constructing the Black subject as the antithesis of the white subject. 2. Understand Black subjectivity as a negotiation between both discourse and materiality, which can produce colonial heteropatriarchy in Black Nationalist counter-discourses, even as they counter racist Othering in Western conceptualization of subjecthood and nationhood (2004). At the same time, Wright notes her dissatisfaction with Gilroy's survey, which according to her, is limited to "mostly African American, heterosexual, and masculine norms, a subject formation that offers little difference from the white subject in the Western nation, with the exception of race" (6). Exposing the heteropatriarchal and masculine framework that authorize Gilroy's scholarship, Wright argues that the dialectic discourse that frames Black diasporic consciousness theorized by Gilroy can only reclaim agency for the Black male Other. For Wright, Black diasporic consciousness cannot be produced in isolation from gender and sexuality, and to do this is to contradict the "intellectual tradition of African diasporic counter-discourses [that is committed to the negotiation] of Black subjectivity" (3).

To deepen the discussion, I incorporate the insights of another Black diasporic scholar, Louis Chude-Sokei, who has written extensively on Black diasporic consciousness. Like majority of African diasporic intellectuals, Chude-Sokei's journey to the explorations of multiple Black or African Diasporas is an intimate one. He admits in one of his interviews that perhaps coming into diaspora studies with the endeavor to represent a cohesive diasporic character is what leaves scholars disillusioned. Interconnection and internal prejudices are not and should not be considered mutually exclusive or incompatible phenomena, particularly with the recognition that the dominant system of imperialist white supremacy capitalist patriarchy that structures every subject's relationship to reality manifests differently based on spatial conditions, time periods, conventions, and socio-politics (2021). For Chude-Sokei, this enlightenment leads him to the point where he is able to relinquish the vision of a homogeneous Black diaspora, and proceed to exploring the heterogeneity of priorities, concerns, perspectives, and machinations within intra-racial and cross-cultural spaces, which assumptive logics of a hybridized cultural space and ex-

perience as a consequence of colonial racism could potentially suppress. Similar to Wright, he emphasizes the importance for Black diasporic scholars to move beyond theorizing Black diasporic subjectivity outside of racial homogeneity so as to be prepared to confront the complex reactions and interests that these diversities engender (2014, 17).

By juxtaposing these foundational theories alongside numerous others on the Black diaspora and integrating them into a dialogue with my selected literary texts, I effectively demonstrate the significance of race and heteropatriarchy as central categories shaping international socio-political structures. I argue that while we (Black people) are implicated diversely in the history of slavery and colonial domination, and therefore do not share or imagine ourselves through a homogeneous Black frame of reference in relation to colonial white supremacy, global interrelated institutional policies nevertheless persist in conscripting Black people into a diametrical relationship with whiteness. Also, Black women, on account of the inseparability of race and gender, are excluded from the gendered protection that is encoded into the hetero-patriarchal rhetoric of nationhood, as is shown by recent international events such as the Ukraine/Russia humanitarian crisis, where international students and women of African heritage reportedly faced anti-Black racist and a combination of racist and sexist violence in the evacuation process.

According to numerous tweets, many with video attachments, Black people were forced off trains and Black women declined from boarding rescue trains even when the announcements clearly mentioned the prioritization of women and children (Hegarty, 2022). Rashawn Ray adds that there were reports of animals being allowed on the trains before people of African descent (2022). Like always, Black people's diversities or their imagination of themselves did not matter. Blackness as diametrical to whiteness would once again prove to be a nucleus of institutional organizing, and Black women overlooked in a humanitarian effort that prioritized the safety of women, who are constructed as "passive (female) members" of the national polity (Wright 2014, 10). To say this was shocking to Black people across Black diasporic spaces would however be an astronomical understatement. That there was no record of anti-Black racist and misogynist incidents would in actuality be the bewildering fact. Immediately, Black feminist affiliates and collective solidarity campaigns in reaction to this anti-Black racist and sexist discrimination began to surface. While tweets across the Black diaspora did not relent in spotlighting the unique struggles of Black people and women caught in this war, the coordinating fundraising ef-

fort and labor of cross-pollinated Black and feminist movements targeted the safe exit of specifically Black people, women, and children.

    A few arresting incidents happened on my very recent research trip to the United States. While my work is situated in critical race studies, whose origin can be traced to the United States, February 2022 would be my first time travelling to the United States for a short research stay at Boston University, College of Arts and Sciences Massachusetts. I had the opportunity to witness a conflict between two dark-skinned Black women; one the bus driver and the other a passenger. The Black female passenger accused the Black female driver of being unprofessional in her duty. Apparently, the driver had on a few occasions neglected to stop at a bus-stop sign to pick her up. When we got to the central station, a white male transport officer was waiting to address the complaint of the passenger. What initially appeared as a simple disagreement quickly escalated into a racially charged confrontation. While reporting her side of the story, the passenger categorically stated that the bus driver's behavior was 'ghetto', but she would not want the white male personnel to think that they share any similarity beyond their Blackness, or that all Black people enact similar behavior. As an African visiting from Europe, I have had my fair share of observing as well as being implicated in everyday public and private racial dialogues. Therefore, I was not completely shocked by this well behaved versus badly behaved counter-discursive strategy adopted by the Black female passenger. Nevertheless, it was quite fascinating to watch this play out within the US space, especially given the extensive U.S.-focused theoretical frameworks I had accumulated through my academic study. In obvious ways, this contradiction in behavior appropriated by the Black female passenger is not out of place and can be unpacked by the concept of respectability politics, which race scholars have described as a continuum of white middle-class rules and etiquettes embodied by African Americans in their endeavor to be recognized as good bourgeois subjects worthy of American civil liberties (White 2001, Harris 2014, Harris 2003). In colloquial version, I call this a 'pick me[4]' form of counter discourse, where a member of a subordinated group reproduces dominant norms, deliberately or not, to skirt the negative stereotypes imposed on their group, in order to be validated by members of the dominant group, or in the least perceived positively.

---

4   I use the term 'pick me' as a derivative of the internet term 'pick me girl', describing a girl or woman who behaves in a certain way, or adopts some certain value system, with the ultimate goal to get male attention and support (see Young 2022).

Another incident happened with a friend whom I visited in the first two weeks of my arrival to Boston. Recently migrated from Nigeria, she wasted no time to regale me with her experiences of racism and her survival endeavors in the United States. For her, two facts stand out: 1. America is a land that is accommodating to diverse dreams. 2. The system is built in such a way to privilege white people. In the same breath as talking about the inferiorization of people of African descent, her prejudicial dislike for African Americans for some racially charged reasons was also expressed. I would however like to point out that my friend's dislike for African Americans is not an isolated one. Her dislike is incited by the larger in-fighting between African immigrants in the US and African Americans, which according to Foday Darboe is engendered by misconceptions and negative stereotypes both groups have internalized about themselves and continue to use against one another (2006). Meanwhile, Bernard Dayo believes that this age-old animosity between these two closely related groups cannot be discussed without examining white supremacy as a culprit (2021), corroborating my argument on white supremacy and global interdependent institutional policies.

In both incidents narrated above, the pulsing moments of intra-racial diversity and noncompliance to generalized racial conscription is unmistakable. Yet, one phenomenon remains valid—the social construction of race and gender as analytical categories, which obligates the Black female passenger to distance her Black gender from the bus driver, even as she critiques her action, as well as my friend's recognition of racial inequality, even as she espouses intra-racial prejudice. What these contemporary occurrences confirm to me—if the constellation of solidarities across the Atlantic (African American, Black Europe and Pan-African) in relation to historical negation of Black lives is not enough conviction—is that our emphatic declaration of intra-racial difference, relegation of race to a perfunctory identification, and disconnection of race from gender and sexuality, will not save us from a global system of anti-Blackness or anti-Africanness that persists in crossing national borders to negate our humanity. On this note, Wright's methodology becomes yet again originative to engaging with my anecdotes. In light of how Black identity has been produced in contradiction to white identity in Western dialectical discourses in ways that continue to trigger both material and discursive consequences for Black subjectivities globally, Black diasporic consciousness is: 1. of paramount importance 2. must recognize other social phenomena e.g., gender and sexuality entrenched in the blueprint of Western dialectic theories of subjectivity 3. must originate a framework that understands Blackness as a unity of di-

versity, produced in so many contrasting and identical ways as Other to the white subject. In essence, Black diasporic counter-discourses must recognize the linkages of Blackness with other analytical categories at the same time that it must be capable of regenerating and redesigning itself.

As much as abundant moments of disparities, legitimate in their commitment to diverse priorities, can be gleaned from Black diasporic novels, the compelling need for a transatlantic subculture of Black resistance cannot yet be dismissed, and it is within this vantage-point that I explore the interlocking character of the struggles of women of African descent or Black women—as I interchange throughout my dissertation— within a Western webbed network of modernity that establishes itself and mutates around the negation of Black subjectivity and consciousness. Because Black women's legacy of struggle, according to Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional theory, assumes a negligible intersectional character, I argue that Black women writers and intellectuals are much more inclined to discern disparities and address neglected stratifications, whether it directly concerns us or not, even as we continue to use our work to facilitate important conversations, and address our problematic erasure, co-optation, and negation. Buchi Emecheta, one of the first prolific African female writers to have appeared on the literary scene and gained worldwide recognition, also shares this sentiment. When asked about her thoughts on the manifestation of a new-shared Black consciousness in writings of Black authors across the Black diaspora in a 1992 interview, she responds that Black American female writers outstandingly champion this sentiment of shared Black consciousness. While Black American writers write from a singular, individuated consciousness, Black American women writers are producing literatures that make visible the multiple African, diasporic subjectivities to express a new Black consciousness. Her distinguishing between Black writers and Black American women writers permits me to conclude that Black writers stand for Black American male writers, who through the agency of colonial patriarchy dominate the Black American literary scene. It is also worth mentioning that Emecheta feels that her work is closely related to literatures produced by Black American women writers than Nigerian male writers. And considering that Emecheta's first text was published in 1972, a period when African countries were freshly coming out of colonial patriarchal rule, it is not farfetched to conclude why she identifies her writings with the former rather than the latter.

By presenting stories beyond any one national border, which usually inadvertently favors ethnic stratification and class delineation, African diasporic

female writers explore the multiple dimensions of power relations that contribute to the hypervisibility and invisibility of Black women in the global world order. Due to the fact of their historical erasure from both Afro-scholarship and feminist movement, their female characters oftentimes dispiritedly straddle the margins of two main domains, challenging vast manifestations of patriarchal oppression within their African societies, together with Eurocentric structures of domination that continue to define modernity in negation to African people's consciousness. Given this peculiarity of Africa's history with Western violent disruptions, my engagement with the cartographies of Black women's struggle —contradictory and overlapping— neither fits neatly into the conventional linear historical configurations nor follow sequential cultural enquiry. Rather, I demonstrate that the multifaceted struggles of Black women as they manifest on structural, interpersonal, and individual levels are also deeply intertwined, so therefore cannot be analyzed in a sequential manner. To do justice to my interrogation of all of these linkages, my search for resources expands beyond any one national border and discipline.

First, I begin with a theoretical chapter, which introduces the key concepts that structure my analysis of the novels. The cynosure of my theoretical approach is my incorporation of psychoanalysis to interrogate the psychological life of colonial power that exerts itself on African female subjects and creates what Frantz Fanon calls "the colonized personality" (2004, 182). I start with a comprehensive explication of Black feminist theory and intersectionality, and how they bring nuance to issues of social justice and equitable laws. My discussion of Black feminist theories also encompasses the Black diaspora and African continent. As the term intersectionality suggests, I use this analytical concept to capture the interconnected identities of Black women and the unique issues that follow belonging to at least two subordinated groups. I incorporate Judith Butler's psychoanalytical theory into my framework to discuss the psychic form that external systems of domination use to interpellate Black women into subjugated subjects beyond the oppression of external institutions and long after the end of direct colonial domination and the felt experience that emerges. Moya Bailey's concept of misogynoir is used to unravel why racial-gendered discrimination against Black women happens and how Black women's experience with gender happens differently from white women and that of women of color. Finally, I follow in the development of the intersectional dimension of Diana Russell's concept of femicide to interrogate the sexist violence and murder of Black girls and women because of their race and gender.

My chapter two centers on the discursive contexts that produce my selected literary texts. Within this chapter, I provide corroboration to my hypothesis that Black female writers, because of the intersection of their marginalization, are more sensitive to the need to problematize the narrative of Otherness. The implication of this is that art and society cannot be easily separated and art in its subjective character is integral to comprehending society. The way I demonstrate this is by reading the literary interviews with the authors of my selected novels as dialogic forms of 'outsider within' portraits. I show that there is an interconnectedness between the lived reality represented in their texts and their socio-historical consciousness as Black women.

My chapter three, sub-divided into three sub-chapters, is titled under the big heading "Mobilizing history and social positionalities". My objective is to assemble Black women's fragmented subjectivities within the backdrop of the historical conditions that activate and facilitate these fragmentations. My first sub-chapter embarks on an introspective journey with depicted characters in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, revealing how their identities become fragmented as consequence of the psychic character of white supremacy and patriarchy that presses on them. This chapter mostly draws from Judith Butler's psychoanalytic theory of power. My second sub-chapter unpacks the intergenerational trauma of having a colonial history. I show how the traumatic legacies of white supremacy and patriarchal domination is activated on both the individual and interpersonal level vis-a-vis stoicism, dissociation and contradictions that cannot be resolved easily by Black female characters in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. My third sub-chapter centers on how the intersection of the Black female characters' race, gender, class, ethnicity, diasporic configuration, religion all come together to shape their agential capacities in the six novels. My assessment of the characters' subjectivities against the backdrop of these aforementioned social categorizations traverses geographical borders to strengthen my argument that there is always a continuous dialogical relationship between the African continent and Black Diaspora.

Chapter four is entitled "Misogynoir and the construction of difference". My objective is to interrogate how Black women's race and gender are weaponized against them to classify them in opposition to white womanhood. It is no new information or research hypothesis that Black women suffer

immense anti-Black structural and interpersonal discrimination and micro-aggression in reference to our hair texture, body morphology, and skin color. My first sub-chapter goes one-step further to unmask the white-centered elements of scrutiny in the entrenched misogynoir expressed against Black women in contemporary society. I unmask these aforementioned elements in Adichie's *Americanah*, Unigwe's *A Bit of Difference*, and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. In the exploration of the pathologization of Black women's bodies, my second sub-chapter examines the overlap between anti-fatness and anti-Blackness in Adichie's *Americanah*, *We Need New Names*, and *A Bit of Difference*. My motivation for examining this is to foreground a decolonial and inter-sectional discourse on body and beauty. My third sub-chapter interrogates the complexity of power dynamics that is present in the kitchen space of the African/Black household. Contrary to popular feminist movement that the kitchen is an embodiment of women's oppression and women's admission into the labor market will come to demonstrate our liberation from patriarchy, I argue in this sub-chapter that this simple binary elocution is far from the case for Black women. *In The Book of Not, Homegoing, Americanah*, and *A Bit of Difference*, I explore how the domestic kitchen is a site of contradiction–of subjugation and safety–for women who are gendered at the same time that they are racialized.

As with my first analysis chapter (three) that begins by mobilizing history to adequately contextualize the Otherness of Black women, chapter five is situated in the contemporary period, and interrogates the continuity of Black women's struggle under a reconfigured power dynamics that permits our humiliation and leaves us vulnerable to myriads of international violence. The reconfigured discursive landscapes I explore are migration, citizenship, and humanitarianism. I examine how the Black female characters in *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, *A Bit of Difference*, and *Americanah* experience these macro sociopolitical landscapes, even as they have other social categories and individuated identities that intersect with their collective racialized-gendered identity. This chapter shows that in spite of Black women's intersection of identities as represented in the novels, which indisputably diversifies their lived realities, as well as the degree to which their life is impacted, the contemporary systems of internationalism as experienced by all of these diverse Black female characters is embroiled in both overt and covert anti-Black and misogynistic violence and disempowerment. These systems of power ultimately inflict harm on them and leave them deeply fractured.

As I have stated already that the entirety of this book is my attempt to examine the complexity of feminist concerns left unexamined in the cumulation of my intellectual journey thus far, I hope that the coalescence of my literary analysis and self-reflexivity conclusively brings cultural competence to the dominant Western transnational literary and cultural scholarships, inside of which I and my work about marginalized particularities is both located and implicated. While I bring together theories and concepts from diverse geopolitical spaces and disciplines, I remain mindful of my principal objective, which is to analyze how Black women experience power and oppression in selected African women's diasporic literatures. I do so with the awareness that that the epistemological systems and social world of Africa and its people have long been subject to Western misrepresentation and appropriation, and I hope that my intellectual work will not contribute to reinforcing this entrenched phenomenon.

1. Phenomenology of Power: Black Feminism and Adjacent Theories

My work, positioned at the intersection of sociological and literary productions, engages with texts spanning the Black commons of Africa, North America, and the European diaspora. To analyze these texts, I employ a multidisciplinary and transatlantic archive of theories for close reading. While a substantial number of theories used in my work are developed by Black American writers, with a reflection on their own anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, the need for a progressive Black liberational ideology is anchored on its commitment to global Black solidarity, given the specific nature of social problems afflicting people of African descent, and our historical legacy with Western domination through slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. My methodology transcends the European, North American diaspora and African continent, and my monograph, analyzing Black female characters' lived reality is fueled by dialogue with the archive of Black feminist scholars and varied white and non-Black scholars that speak to the issues of power and identity, which can be used to deconstruct Black women's subjectivities as well as create pathways to Black women flourishing. This personal interest in Black women flourishing is reflected in one of my subsections on psychoanalytical scholarship that speaks to issues of subjectivity and subjection. Reflection on the internalized intricacies of power and domination helps me to engage with the subjective process of Black women's becoming that does not rest solely on the outer appearance of power and domination. In addition, because my theories are strongly interwoven and greatly influence one another, I examine their main articulations in subsections and at their points of intersection.

Many of the past explorations by feminist and Black liberational movements have left Black women out of both women-centered perspectives and Black-centered struggles. Although this exclusion has been redressed over the years and continues to be addressed by Black women intellectuals, "the

years of exclusion of Black women has meant that the concepts, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies of women's history and women's studies have been developed without consideration of the experiences of Black women" (Brown 2004, 47). This mutual exclusion of Black women's experiences is predicated on the assumption that women's struggle and race struggle is separable, so even though Black women's experiences may include these two struggles, they "insist upon delimiting each" (47). The necessity to capture these inseparable and convergent issues has led many Black women on the continent and in the African diaspora to seek other terminologies, creating newer terms like Womanism, African feminism, Stiwanism, Afro feminism, Postcolonial feminism, Black feminism, and Intersectional feminism. These newer terminologies seek to incorporate the multidisciplinary analysis of Black women's lives and struggles (racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, political etc.) into their feminist consciousness with the understanding that disconnection from both feminist and pro-Black movement is not the solution, rather, a reconstruction that recognizes "the interconnection between race and sex" even if they have to "battle their white sisters and their Black brothers to achieve it" (48). Despite the historical erasure of Black women from public consideration, Black women have continuously maintained critical spaces of intersectional analysis and contributed to mainstream feminist thinking. Black American feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker have explored Black women issues towards self-determination and social problems in ways that are very intersectional. In her groundbreaking work on Black sexual politics, Patricia Hill Collins persuasively argues that for the wholeness of the Black race, the categories of race, gender, class, gender, and sexuality must always be treated as "mutually constructing systems of power" (2004, 11) rather than "competing frameworks for developing a progressive Black sexual politics" (10). One must not be ranked more important or valid than another, as that will only lead to crippling the "social justice core of a progressive Black sexual politics" (10).

Although in the Black diaspora "Black American culture looms large and has a tendency to crowd out and misunderstand other histories and understandings of Blackness and resistance" (Emejulu & Sobande 2019, 4), my pre-determination to theorize Black feminism across these geographical spaces is predicated on my hypothesis that while there is a connection between North America's and Europe's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist histories and struggles, the Black experience and liberational struggles should not be universalized. Most importantly, Black feminism as a theory, which interrogates power

structures and "valorizes the knowledge production and lived experiences of different Black women" (1), must also endeavor to theorize the lived experiences of Black women across different contexts, reflecting on the similarities of experiences across linguistic, cultural, and national borders, as well as the nuanced differences amongst the various local contexts (8–9). This hypothesis is reflected in my selection of novels that I use to interrogate the hegemonic constructions of racialized and gendered social order vis-a-vis Black women's layers of Otherness.

For this reason, I interchange often between the terms Black and African in reference to women of African descent. I use both terms to refer to women of African heritage, recognizing the shared history of transatlantic slavery, the exploitation and dispossession of Africa's resources and African women's sexual and reproductive freedom, and the ongoing systemic experience of anti-Blackness that connects all African people. This subordination of African people and our relegation to the bottom of the social structure has culminated in substantial scholarly research into the process of liberation from global systems of domination. African feminism on the continent according to Filomena Chioma Steady is not exempted from this scholarly endeavor. According to Steady, African feminism is a humanistic feminism, which is a "product of polarizations and conflicts that represents some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering" (1987, 4). Hence, I draw a connection between the descendants of African women in the African diaspora and women on the continent and use the racialized term 'Black' to reflect the global socio-political categorization of African descendants on and outside the continent.

My introduction unfolds in four major parts. First, I discuss Black feminism and intersectionality as they expand and contour each other. Then I delve into a thorough examination of Black feminist theories, focusing on how they center the lived experiences of Black women, who navigate a reality often characterized by exploitation, disposability, and dispossession across the globe. My second sub-section as I spotlighted above focuses on how Black women become Black female subjects to be imposed upon by racialized-gendered power. My third sub-section explores the contemporary concept of misogynoir as coined and expanded upon by two Black feminist scholars. In conclusion, I undertake an in-depth inquiry into the femicide of Black women, particularly spotlighting how racialized sexism plays a significant role in these tragic occurrences.

1.1   Bodies that do not matter[1]

The concept of intersectionality and Black feminist theories are strongly in-
terwoven because of their approaches to feminist thoughts and social justice
movements. Intersectionality is an analytic tool that is rooted in Black femi-
nist criticism and critical race theory. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights activist
and legal scholar, first introduced it in 1989. In her paper "Demarginalizing
the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimi-
nation Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", Crenshaw uses in-
tersectionality as an analytic tool to address Black women's theoretical erasure
within traditional feminist and Black liberational theory and politics as well
as their marginalization via legal and political systems. She engages this an-
alytic tool with the objective that centering Black women's experiences within
the single-axis frameworks of both resistance movements and legal systems
will reveal how their theoretical frameworks make use of prototypical repre-
sentatives to define the contours of sex and race discrimination, consequently
excluding Black women from structural remediation and institutional trans-
formation. To quote Crenshaw: "In other words, in race discrimination cases,
discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks;
in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women"
(1989, 140). To capture the intersectional experience of Black women, using var-
ious legal examples, Crenshaw argues that "the entire framework that has been
used as a basis for translating "women's experience' or "the Black experience"
into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast" (140). Although
race is still regarded "by many as the primary oppositional force in Black lives"
(162) around which activism converges, Crenshaw proposes that a holistic in-
vestigation of the problems of the Black community "will reveal that gender
subordination does contribute significantly to the destitute conditions of so
many African Americans" (162), and also that the rationalization of racial har-
mony most often relegates Black women's concerns to the "periphery in public
policy discussions about the presumed needs of the Black community" (163).
Crenshaw submits that the only way to include every disadvantaged group in
remedial policies is by persistently centering the needs and problems of the
most oppressed (167).

---

1   This is an obvious nod to Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*
(1993).

Intersectionality has generated considerable amount of controversy and contestation of its originality because of its popularity and proliferation across and outside the academic space. Devon Carbado in his 2013 essay "Colorblind intersectionality" reinvigorates the theory by first addressing some standard criticisms of the theory and then moving it forward to new sites and concerns. His desire to reinvigorate intersectionality is also based on Edward Said's standpoint that trans-demographic application of theories should be embraced because they "can become more insurrectionary and capacious as they travel" (Said 2000 as qtd in Carbado 812). Contrary to one of the criticisms that intersectionality is only or largely about Black women and can only be applied to the mapped terrain of race and gender, Carbado contends that intersectionality does not "necessarily and inherently privilege any social category" (812). What intersectionality does is specify the distinctive forms of oppression experienced by those with intersecting subordinate identities (814). That Black women and race and gender feature prominently is because of "the particular juridical and political sites in which Crenshaw sought to intervene" (812), by illustrating "the constitutive and ideologically contingent role law plays in creating legible and illegible juridical subjects and identities" (815). Furthermore, Carbado argues that intersectionality does not map fixed hierarchies onto particular identities, but instead highlights how "both power and social categories are contextually constituted" (813–814).

Lending a note of credibility to his claims, Carbado employs intersectionality to engage "men, masculinity, whiteness, and sexual orientation, social categories that have been said to be beyond intersectionality's theoretical reach and normative concern" (Carbado 817). By flipping the discursive terrain of intersectionality, he introduces two concepts – "colorblind intersectionality and gender-blind intersectionality" (817) to illustrate how "formal equality frameworks in law and civil right advocacy entrench normative gender identities, consequently producing racialized gender identities (817). He explains both concepts as instances in which whiteness and white male heterosexuality, which helps to produce other cognizable social categories, is represented as an invisible "intersectional subject position" (817). Carbado's representational currency of white male heterosexuality with respect to gender-blind intersectionality is quite perceptive. He expounds that, although white male heterosexuality is "a triply blind intersectionality of which gender-blind intersectionality is but a part" (818), these mutual axes of differentiation construct "a high-status intersectionality whose conduct is already normative" (818) because of the intersectional identities behind such conducts. He concludes

by affirming that gender-blind intersectionality is not exclusive to white heterosexual men. Black heterosexual men also benefit from this phenomenon, though not in the same substantial way: "Rarely do we frame Black heterosexual men in intersectional terms. This gender-blind intersectionality is an effect of and contributes to the representational potential heterosexual Black men have to stand in for the "race" in antiracist organizing and theorizing" (818).

According to Patricia Hill Collins, "the convergence of race, class and gender oppression characteristic of US slavery" shaped African American women's intra and inter social relationships and created the "political context" for their intellectual work (2000, 6). Collins in her analysis of the US context dissects African American women's oppression into three interdependent dimensions; first is the economic dimension via exploitation of their labor, second is the political dimension by means of denying them the rights and privileges accorded to white male citizens, and third is the ideological dimension, by projecting and proliferating racist and sexist stereotypes about African American women (6–7). These prevailing contradictions in the reality of Black women's treatment, within the contours of American multiculturalism, despite the "democratic promises of individual freedom, equality under the law, and social justice" promised to all American citizens would make a huge component of US. Black feminist thought (7). Collins maintains that both "US and European women's studies" (7) and "African American social and political thought" (9), which were also constituted primarily to challenge hegemonic white male scholarship, ironically have also employed similar yet different ways to oppress Black women's ideas. These tactics of oppression are intentional omission, commodification, and tokenization (symbolism without transformation) in the white feminist arena, and inclusion through subordinate roles to further Black men's rights, gender discrimination, in addition to the Anglo-European biblical doctrine of absolute female submission in Black intellectuals' organizations. This historical oppression of Black women, Collins argues, becomes visible upon closer examination of the theories propounded as universally applicable to both women and Black people as a group (8). To this end, Black feminist thought is engaged with scrutinizing, challenging, and deconstructing mainstream scholarship, theories, epistemologies, and standards of legitimacy of intellectual discourse, whilst also discovering, reclaiming, re-interpreting, and analyzing Black women's subjugated works through new theoretical frameworks (16–18).

Because Black feminist thought concerns itself with the lived experiences of Black women, developing Black feminist thought requires delineating the epistemological framework that can be used to delimit Black feminist thought from other social critical theory. Who and what should be characterized as Black feminist becomes pertinent to its legitimacy. For Collins, using "standard epistemological criteria" (18) to develop Black feminist scholarship will produce another form of subjugation, because Black women are "neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class" academia (17). In addition, "traditional epistemological assumptions concerning how we arrive at truth" (17) must be disassembled for full Black empowerment. The criteria to defining social critical theory as Black and feminist, Collins concludes is an engagement with "self-conscious struggle on behalf of Black women" as envisioned within Black feminism, regardless of the "actual social location where that work occurs" (18). Nevertheless, the centrality of Black women intellectuals to Black feminist thought "does not mean that others cannot participate" (39), or that it must concern itself with only the analysis of one's own experiences (41). Instead, Black feminism advocates that coalition scholarship should be pursued via ethical, principled dialogues that explore "the parallels between Black women's experiences and those of other groups" (42) with the intent to "further social justice projects" (41) and "possibilities for new versions of truth" (42). Nevertheless, Collins insists that the prefix "Black" is quite significant to the whole appellation. This is because feminism is commonly regarded to operate exclusively within white American boundaries and against Black and American identities. Due to this hasty perception, Black women "routinely choose race and let the lesser question of gender go" when asked to choose (Collins 1996, 13). To this end, the adjective 'Black' "challenges the assumed Whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both white and Black women", while also providing relief and safety for Black women to conceptualize their own paradoxical reality (13).

In Europe, the term Black feminism is less commonly used. In their introduction to a collection of essays on Black feminist knowledge production in Europe, Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande argue that Afrofeminism is more frequently and preferentially used in place of Black feminism (2019, 5). While there are many similarities between Black feminism and Afrofeminism, they argue that Afrofeminism is conceived on the "distinct European racialized social order" and unpacks the "existing experiences and histories of European Black feminists resisting racist and sexist domination" (5). Nicole Grégoire and Modi Ntambwe contend that in Belgium, Afrofeminism is quite

young, and was created out of the need to "counter male patriarchy in the colonization movement and to voice their own postcolonial critique" (2019, 68). They maintain that prior to Afrofeminism, there were several movements dedicated to the African diaspora that focused on "stimulating immigrant's participation in the Belgian civil society" (67). These emancipatory organizations were usually non-gendered and occasionally initiated and led by migrant women of African descent, confirming that activism led by African women is not a new concept (66). While the first generation of African organizations adopted an accommodating-integrationist approach with the host society, the young Afro movements, although intergenerationally and intersectionally linked to older African organizations, employed "more subversive forms of activism" (68), which involved talking back to the system and asserting the "permanence of the Black presence in Europe" (68). For this younger generation, often children of immigrants, advocacy for the community was focused on "Black or Pan-African solidarity in Belgium, Europe, and the rest of the world, rather than on 'homeland' – related activities" like their parents' generation pursued (68). Although there was an obvious transformation in the approach, the movements were mostly "male led" (68) and catered to racial politics. This created the need for Afro women in Belgium to branch out and create new political identifications tailored to "address their own oppression and emancipation from an intersectional perspective" (69). These Afro feminist collectives are mobilized to actively participate and provide support to Afro women, so they insist on grounding analysis of "non-mixed spaces where Afro descendant women share their experience and strategies about their racialized and gendered conditions" (69). These layers of oppression have subsequently expanded the vocabulary of the discourse, and new interpretive frameworks, theories, and concepts, such as misogynoir, whitemensplaining, whitewomensplaining, negrophobia, and many more developed in order to capture Afro women's daily lived experience of gendered racism (70).

To address the ever-growing international legacy of feminist matters, Ien Ang argues that feminism must always leave room for "ambivalence and ambiguity" (2003, 191) rather than adopt a politics of inclusion amidst a united global sisterhood. Differences produced by the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality, among others, prompt a difference in social positioning. It should not be the intention of feminists to resolve these differences between women, as that would imply that differences must comply with feminism's frame of essentialism, thereby reducing the social relations into an asymmetry between two categories (man and woman). Rather, the prolifera-

tion of difference should aim at dismantling hegemonic categories situated along the axis of "white-dominated, Western, capitalist modernity", which has subsumed other political, economic, social, and ideological standards and narratives as a result of a global historical development throughout the last 500 years (197). Ang points out that the chasm between Black and white foundational feminist knowledge and advocacy is a consequence of the differences between their realities and experiences. Women who fall into the 'othered' category all share a common "fundamental sense of permanent dislocation" (197) in relation to white hegemony and are left with the option to either assimilate or be excluded. This is, it is important to note, what white feminists need to be aware of when dealing with difference.

In mapping feminist historiography in the Global South, postcolonial feminist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that the scholarly engagement with feminist issues is very limited, even though there has been a large body of scholarship on women in developing countries (2008, 195). This is not because 'third world' women do not contribute to feminist discourse, but because our contributions, like our multilayered oppression, intersect with a number of progressive discourses (195). Mohanty maintains that addressing and constructing the history of 'third world' women's feminisms entails exploring the links among intersecting progressive discourses and oppositional struggles against racism, sexism, colonialism, slavery, imperialism, neocolonialism, capitalism, citizenship, nationalism, oppressive cultural memory, and many more, which proves that third world feminism is political rather than biological or cultural (196). One can argue that this is due to African women's grappling with multitudinous simplistic narratives of us that imposes rather than negotiates with us. We are either depicted as happy and content with our subordinated status in the narratives of African male writers (Peterson 1995, 253), or situated within the boundaries of Western feminist narratives (Mohanty).

In the essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty likewise examines the production and articulation of third world women in some recent Western feminist writings. In her analysis, she focuses on three main analytical strategies of Western feminist productions: (1) the location of the category of 'woman' within the context of analysis accompanied by an encompassing universal analysis of this category; (2) the methodology provided for their argument of universality and cross-cultural validity; and (3) the political presupposition underlying their methodology and analytical strategies (2003, 52–53). Within these modes of analysis, the image of the

third world woman "undergoes double oppression of being third world and woman in contrast to the self-representation of Western women as the norm and modern" (53). Within the context of hegemonic power and hierarchical relations, an authorizing signature of "privilege and ethnocentric universality" (51) is imposed on the third world woman by Western feminist writings. This is accomplished without an adequate "self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the third world in the context of a world system dominated by the West" (51). However, for third world women, this dominant representation signifies to us a replication of imperialism.

My monograph hence argues that in order for coalition politics across cultural and racial boundaries to be effectual, it is important to consider not only the knowledge that is represented, but also the position from which that representation is engaged with and subsequently produced. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí in her critical dissection of the colonial institution vis-a-vis feminist ideologies of women's oppression argues that the concept of female inferiority was something foreign, successfully imported by the colonial power, before which African women participated fully within their local contexts. 'Anafemales' like the 'Anamales' in the Yoruba society, one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, had multiple identities which were not based on biology, the very idea by which females were categorized and reduced within Western gender ideology (2006, 257). Colonial developmental policies founded on the ideological superiority of men were directed primarily at African men, stripping African women completely of their localized identities and social status and investing in African males more power and authority with new meanings. While only two categories existed within Western society (man and woman), there was a hierarchy of four categories in colonized contexts (European men, European women, African men, and African women). Although African men were excluded from the higher echelons of power, they were recognized and represented in society at the lower levels of government and marginally at elite levels, while African women were completely erased from all colonial structures, suffering double colonization. The manifestations of the double oppression for African women we have today, according to Oyěwùmí, are outcomes of the "combination of race and gender factors because European women did not occupy the same position in the colonial order as African women" (257). Similarly, Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* takes offence to the sovereignty of western feminism and "the interpretation and use of data on African women in the West" (1987, 1). Using an ethnographic methodology to examine the social and gender system of an Igbo village town, Nnobi, Amadiume argues that Igbo gen-

der construction was flexible prior to colonialism and "was separate from bi-
ological sex" (15). Igbo women actively participated in both public and private
spheres. They were depicted in origin narratives as empowered and agential
beings, had access to lands and agricultural power, amassed wealth, possessed
political voice and currency, and occupied roles such as female husbands, re-
flecting more complex gender and social system. Both Oyĕwùmí and Amadi-
ume's polemics cohere with Mohanty's argument that it is not color or sex that
constructs the ground for these struggles, rather the way we think about them,
which makes 'Third world' feminist struggles "political rather than biological or
cultural bases for alliance" (2008, 196).

Because of the colonial destabilization of most of African societies, there
has been a critical research problem due to the absence of inexhaustible pre-
colonial data. In addition, Indigenous African cultures, values, and activities
were observed and interpreted through a colonial patriarchal standard. The
pattern of analysis previous historians followed, according to Rosalyn Terbog-
Penn, was to erase the female presence and perspective when analyzing the
data collected from African and African diasporic history (1987, 43). For most
of the studies carried out on the gender fabric of the African societies, Ter-
bog-Penn argues that the majority of the data were often extrapolated from
post-colonial archives, engendering the dangerous assumption that "Black
women have always had a history of being victimized, like the stereotyped
slave woman, or of being victimized like the stereotyped Black matriarch" (44).
This way of historicizing Black women's place in the African society, according
to Terbog-Penn, has fostered narrow ways of (de)constructing Black women's
experiences, to center them either as passive citizens who need to be saved
by the West, or as abusive matriarchs (44). This makes the interdisciplinary
methods and cross-cultural perspectives that is being embraced in the emerg-
ing field of African diaspora for the reconstruction of Black women's history,
an exciting endeavor (44).

bell hooks[2] is one of such theorists who committed herself to reconstruct-
ing Black women's past and examine Black women's lives. For bell hooks,
the oppression of Black women is a combination of numerous socio-cultural
interactions between traditional African societies and colonial empires. In her
inquiry into the nature of domination, she contrives the expression 'imperial-
ist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' to describe the interlocking power

---

2   bell hooks's name is deliberately written in lowercase in accordance with the author's
     style of writing her own name.

structure undergirding the social order. In her conversation with George Yancy, hooks expounds on the significance of the phrase for contemporary feminist movement. Instead of separately stressing any one of these systems of subjugation, hooks explains that the phrase posits a "global context, of the context of class, of empire, of capitalism, of racism and of patriarchy. Those things are all linked – an interlocking system (2015, n.p). Over the years, she has persistently argued that an accurate picture of Black women's status cannot be formed from focusing on either racial hierarchies or women's roles under the patriarchal social order. Reflecting on the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism of the African continent in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and Feminism* (1982), hooks contemplates the unique suffering and op-pression of enslaved Black women. Her assertion that "sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands" (15) was founded on historical scholarships deeply engaged with in her book. She describes the slave trade as one that was first focused on the importation of Black males for labor because the "Black female slave was not as valued as the Black male slave" (15). However, the passing of time and recognition that enslaved Black women could be made to produce offspring for economic gain increased their market value (16). hooks notes that further examination of 18th and 19th century historical scholarships document that the African female in the colonies were also subjugated by the African males, so it was a case of one sexism interacting with another form of sexism. According to hooks, white male observers of African culture in the 18th and 19th century recorded that the African female was not only inferior within their patriarchal social order but was at the same time made to participate actively in the community labor force (16).

This local social order, hooks convincingly argues, came to have a profound influence on the treatment of the Black female slave in the American colonies, "exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault" (22), while the Black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields" (22) and allowed to "maintain some semblance of their societally defined masculine role" (21). The African woman on the other hand was probably seen as an ideal subject for slavery, because they could execute both masculine and feminine prescribed gender roles (17–21). She expresses her disagreement with historians and soci-ologists' perspectives on slavery that suggest that Black men were much more victimized than Black women because they were stripped of their patriarchal status during slavery (20). hooks classifies this perspective as one advanced

by a sexist social order and cautions that we must recognize the implication in the assertion that the subjugation of Black women is essential to the Black male's humanization and "development of a positive self-concept" (21). Methods that were used to de-humanize and effectively "transform the African human being into a slave" (19) ranged from physical torture to ideological indoctrination. For enslaved Black girls and women, rape, sexual exploitation, breeding, intentional indecent exposure, sadistic floggings of naked Black female slaves, deplorable childbearing conditions, physical brutalization of Black children, anti-woman Christian teachings, racist-sexist stereotyping of Black womanhood, and institutionalization of sexist discrimination were all sadistic misogynistic acts used to strip Black women of their dignity (22–43). The two forces of oppression (sexism and racism) suffered by Black women clearly signify that the lives of Black women were made much more difficult than that of the Black male slave.

Abuse of Black women, according to hooks, was not limited to white men. Black men and white women also participated in displaying the racist-sexist ideologies they absorbed from the imperialist white supremacist patriarchal system. Historical narratives of Black female slaves sexually molested by Black male slaves indicate that, "rather than assuming the role of protector, Black men imitated the white man's behavior" (35), creating a black sub-culture which emulated imperialist white supremacist anti-woman sexual politics.

> It is likely that the Black male slave did not feel demoralized or de-humanized because 'his' women were being raped, but that he did feel terrorized by the knowledge that white men who were willing to brutalize and victimize Black women and girls (who represented no great threat to their authority), might easily have no qualms about totally annihilating Black men. Most Black male slaves stood quietly by as white masters sexually assaulted and brutalized Black women and were not compelled to act as protectors (35).

Black female slaves were also easy targets for white women, who were also caught in the webs of the white men's anti-women sentiments. Historical records of white women physically assaulting and sexually exploiting Black female slaves abound, and for those who did not participate in these acts, they were nevertheless reluctant to "involve themselves with a slave's plight for fear of jeopardizing their own position in the domestic household" (36). hooks hypothesizes that white women's decision to maintain a passive stance regarding the brutality inflicted on enslaved Black women might be associated with the

trepidation of suffering a similar fate if "Black women were not available to bear the brunt of such intense anti-women male aggression" (39). Following several slave narratives and diaries, it takes little imagination to comprehend that white women's kinship with white men on the "common ground of racism enabled them to ignore the anti-woman impulse that also motivated attacks on Black women" (39). In hooks's work, we find a sustained argument that both prior to and following slavery, Black womanhood has been systematically devalued by white and Black men alike, functioning as a deliberate mechanism of patriarchal control. While the oppression of Black women, institutionalized by other oppressive practices continued long after slavery was abolished, they have been the recipient of patriarchal oppression long before slavery. However, the system of enslavement, the dominant white culture and multiple perpetrators involved in the domination of Black women has led to an alteration in the patterns of anti-Black sexist oppression perpetuated on Black women.

Clenora Hudson-Weems in her robust theoretical writing on the status and struggles of African women, both in the diaspora and at home, takes an oppositional stance to bell hook's theoretical analysis and conclusion. Calling for the academic reassessment of the historical complex realities of African women, Hudson-Weems advocates for the renaming of a theoretical legitimacy that prioritizes Black women's realities and struggles, and a distancing of such theoretical legitimacy and empowering movement from the tag 'feminism'. Her reason being that such appellation even with a silhouetting prefix of Black or African will always suggest a relative compatibility with the agenda, needs and demands of white women feminists. In contrast to hooks, Hudson-Weems argues that African women were equal to their African male counterparts within African cosmology. In spite of the individual particularities, which unfortunately have dominated and eclipsed the group characteristic of African gender history, African women "have not had that sense of powerlessness that white women speak of, nor have they been silenced or rendered voiceless by their male counterparts, as is the expressed experience of white women" (2020, 31). The characterization of African women's status as recipients of African men's sexist domination and brutality, prior to Anglo-European colonial activities, Hudson-Weems claims, is a misguided generalization based on unsystematic personal experiences. Moreover, Black feminists who incline their arguments in that direction "base their decisions upon either naivety about the history and ramifications of feminism or on negative experiences with Africana men" (17). Upon this conclusive account, Hudson-Weems makes the decision to coin the term "Africana womanism",

with the argument that even other variances of African-women-centered-ideology like Black feminism, African feminism, Alice Walker's womanism etc. do not sufficiently address African women's plight, owing to the fact that like their white feminist counterparts, they perceive "gender issues to be most critical" (16) in their quest for collective liberation. This inadvertently exposes their movements to the risk of co-optation and obliteration by hegemonic white feminist activities. For Hudson-Weems, an African-woman-centered-ideology must be grounded in the commitment and mission to center the dignity and humanity of all African people and actualize the liberation of the African race.

Niara Sudarkasa takes a similar approach on the investigation of African women's intersectional oppression. She argues that the hierarchical ascription introduced into the gender atmosphere in Africa is mostly influenced by the positionality of the writers. By examining the "roles of women in families and descent groups, in the economy, and in the political process in West Africa" (1987, 28), extrapolating her data from preindustrial stateless and state societies, Sudarkasa counters the overall "subordinate-superordinate relationship" (27) used to characterize women's relationship to men. She argues that gender is only one of the defining characteristics among the many "clusters of statuses" (27) identifiable in African societies. Age was one of these characteristics used to regulate interpersonal relations. Within the kin groups, the order of birth superseded gender, and younger males had to show respect to older females. In addition, the wife status was not restricted to the conjugal male and female relationship. Wives' positionality within the Yoruba extended family, for example, was also a core of their identity. "African extended families, which are the normal coresidential form of family in indigenous precolonial African societies" (30) extended beyond the conjugal into the consanguineal. The tendency to assess the status of women in Africa only within the constituent nuclear parameter is a derivate of Western paradigm that has led to the "misrepresentation of many aspects of African kinship" (30). Within their lineages, African women had rights and responsibilities that were independent of men and vice versa. Even though in patrilineal African societies, women as wives generally show "deference to their husbands", however, it is important to not neglect other kinship roles, where women were positioned as authority figures and deferred to (31). In the precolonial political and economic spheres, African women also participated actively at the highest levels of government, and remarkably contributed to the sustainability of both the public and domestic domains. Yet, African women's participation has often times been dismissed as

"simply women controlling women" (33) and still subordinate to men in the wider context due to the peculiar parallel male and female rulership adopted by indigenous African societies. Sudarkasa yet again dismisses this viewpoint as an "a priori judgment" with the argument that the public domain in West Africa was one in which both sexes' complementary roles were duly given recognition (33). This is in contradiction to Western conceptualization of the category of the 'third world' woman as being oppressed, helpless and looking to others to advocate for her liberation (Mohanty 2002, 196–198, Terbog-Penn 1987, 44). Sudarkasa reveals that a neutral complementarity rather than a hierarchical partnership more accurately describes the gender relation in indigenous African societies, assenting to the suggestion that the hierarchical gender relations contemporary Africa has emulated is because of the incursion of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (36).

Given this context, it is conceivable that the ease with which enslaved Black women in America assumed perceived masculine roles both in the home and on the plantation, as well as the matriarchal characteristics used persistently to stereotype Black women have their roots in indigenous African ethos. Nevertheless, all of these perspectives have their merits because they represent the various cross-cultural perspectives and interdisciplinary methods applied by Black feminist theorists to investigate the historical fact of Black women's oppression, while emphasizing the continuity of their experiences across time. Additionally, my research is neither focused on the construction and reconstruction of Black women's history nor is it situated in the field of history or cultural history. My work, situated within the field of literary criticism, instead aims to examine the representations of Black women's everyday encounters with power and oppression and how these experiences are articulated in literary texts. To echo Minna Salami's African feminist critique, "We don't need to dutifully refer to protofeminism[3] in historical Africa to justify feminism today" (2025, 171).

---

3   Minna Salami defines "protofeminism" as a kind of feminism that focuses on proving the existence of feminism in relation to African women's autonomy and equality in Africa, rather than engaging with important issues of equality and justice that viscerally affect African women (2025, 163).

1.2   Butler, Psychoanalytic Theory, and the Becoming of the Black Female Subject

In exploring the lived realities of Black women and reaching new conclusions, it is vital to grasp how we are shaped by the complex interplay of power dynamics, knowledge systems, and processes of subject formation. Judith Butler in their 1997 book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in* Subjection, establishes their theory of the life of power and constitution of subjectivity through engaging with, critiquing, and expanding Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) and Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971). Significantly, Butler proceeds to ask some critical questions that according to them was not addressed in earlier essays on power. If, according to Foucault and Althusser, power is that which presses on us from the outside to subordinate us, and at the same time, produces and sustains our agency in our internalization and acceptance of its terms, then what are the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission, and what is the psychic form that power takes to engender submission? Is the psyche excluded from the disciplinary regimes imposed on the body? Finally, is there possibility for resistance to our unconscious attachments to subjection if we are already the effect of subjection? Butler takes on this project to establish a link between the discourse of power and the discourse of psychoanalysis, because it is an essential inquiry that according to them has not been adequately addressed by writers in both "Foucauldian and psychoanalytic orthodoxies" (1997, 3). By asking these critical questions, Butler's overall objective is to show how the subject formed by power becomes the principle of their own subjection by virtue of the effect of the regulatory formation of the psyche. Finally, how this psychoanalytical conception of the subject works in "tandem with processes of social regulation" to constitute the subject's self-identity (19).

Both works focus on the role of institutions in maintaining power structures and shaping subjectivities and intersubjectivities. Foucault's insight into the operation of power and subjectivation, according to Butler, articulates the soul as the embodiment of the normative ideal unleashed by the relation of power. Analyzing Foucault's disciplinary mechanism, Butler argues that Foucault establishes the subjectivation of the prisoner on a combination of the prison's spatial captivity and signifying practices of the prison such as inspection, confession, regularization and normalization of bodily movement and gesture (85). Foucault, according to Butler, underlines that the prison through the adoption of particular material practices, possess, alters, and

codifies the prisoner's individuality by forcing the prisoner to "approximate an ideal, a norm of behavior, a model of obedience, [...] and a regulatory principle" (85). By making the prisoner adopt these material and abstract ideals, Butler argues, is the way the soul of a prisoner, as Foucault calls it, is inculcated into a subject and the subject becomes the effect or principle of its identity — "coherent [and] totalized" (85). Butler, however, argues that Foucault in his preoccupation with how the identity we wear and perform comes into being appears to privilege the "metaphor of the prison" and trivialize the frame of the soul, thus rendering his theory of power inadequate for inquiry into subjection and subjectivity (85). In light of this interpretation, Butler's concern is how to make sense of this imposing and imprisoning frame of the soul, if identity is always already produced through "imprisonment and invasion" (85). Butler proceeds to answer by first counterposing the 'soul' with the 'psyche' in the psychoanalytic sense (86). For Butler, the reiteration that a subject requires to remain a subject and maintain its coherence,[4] coupled with the possibility of resistance to subjectivation, counters Foucault's theorization of the soul or psyche as imprisoning and totalizing. Thus, if resistance at the level of the psyche is possible, then the psyche must be separated from the subject, because it is the psyche that "exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity, to become a coherent subject" (86). In essence, the repetition an identity requires to maintain coherence, together with palpable resistance exhibited by the subject, undermines the force of normalization as capable of producing an always already coherent subject, thus severing the psyche from the provisional subject, and eliminating any notion of the psyche as imprisoning. Butler, however, implores that one should not make an extreme leap that the only function of the psyche is to contrive resistance to normalizing ideals, or replace psyche with resistance, as this could also bring into focus an attachment to subjection that is found at the level of the unconscious (88).

Reading Louis Althusser's conceptualization of power and subjectivity, Butler argues, reflects a similar submission with Foucault. According to Butler, Althusser stages an interpellative scenario or social scene that involves an alignment between a hailing made by an addresser and responsiveness of the addressee to such hailing. Reading Althusser's metaphorical illustration in his

---

4   See Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) for explanation on how gender as an identity is formed through a set of repetitive acts and practices that are said to be its results.

influential essay, a police officer calling "Hey you there!" elicits a recognition that "that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed', and not someone else (1971, 49). This recognition is followed by a positive response from the hailed individual, and it is in this recognition and subsequent turning to respond to the hailing that ideology has functioned to transform individuals into subjects. Yet, Althusser concedes that this recognition and consciousness of one's subjective self is an enigmatic phenomenon, which, in reality, does not follow the temporal sequence of his metaphorical explanation: "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" because there is never a pre-discursive self that is prior to the conferral of identity, as the self is always already confined within the discursive subjectivation of ideology (49). Of importance yet again, is the metaphor of the police officer, which Butler argues, establishes a disciplinary scene (1997, 107) just like Foucault's metaphor of the prison and the prisoner. Building upon Althusser's doctrine of interpellation, Butler is yet again concerned with how the consenting subject, who turns to answer the officer of the law, materializes. What kind of relationship binds both the officer and the subject such that the subject is conditioned to turn by both the officer's voice and its own inclination? Butler expresses their dissatisfaction with Althusser's interpellation, which in an attempt to explain the force that he grants to his social ideology to compel a vulnerable subject, turns to the metaphor of the church, as an authority divinely empowered "to name, and in naming, bring its subjects into being" (110). This equivalence between social interpellation and the divine power of interpellating structures, Butler maintains, is inadequate to explain the readiness and anticipation of the subject "to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation" (111). This notion of the enigmatic workings of the performative power of the authoritative voice on which interpellation depends, Butler insists also "promises no enlightened escape from ideology" (110).

> Significantly, Althusser does not offer a clue as to why the individual turns around, accepting the voice as being addressed to him or her, and accepting the subordination and normalization effected by that voice. Why does this subject turn toward the voice of the law, and what is the effect of such a turn in inaugurating a social subject? Is this a guilty subject and, if so, how did it become guilty? Might the theory of interpellation require a theory of conscience? (5).

The implication in Althusser's model of subject formation, according to Butler, would be to accept that the power in the interpellative scene appropriates a mysterious form. That there is neither an intelligible reference to a pre-existing subject which then undergoes and internalizes subordinating mechanisms, nor can there be any further interrogation into why the subject responds to the hailing because Althusser's "model of internalization takes for granted that an internal and external have already been formed" (115). This model, Butler stresses would reveal a unilateral distinction in the argumentation on subject formation (10).

In addressing the shortcomings of Althusser's theorization, Butler theorizes the concept of guilt and compulsion to account for the enigmatic chasm occupied by pre-discursive subjects who prepare to enter into the site of intelligibility, internalize and become attached to subjectifying conditions that assign their interpellative terms. Butler admonishes for "the subject" not to be interchanged with "the person" or "the individual", but instead be regarded as "a linguistic category, a place holder, structure in formation" (10). Since individuals acquire their intelligibility by being exposed to interpellative process through which they become subjects, this implies that the arbitrary use of the individual presents an impossible situation that must go in cooperation with the implicit supposition "that the constitution has already taken place" (11). In this sense, one has already "yielded before one turns around, and that turning is merely a sign of an inevitable submission by which one is established as a subject positioned in language as a possible addressee" (111). For Butler, the framework of interpellation contingent on the performative condition of psychic subjection expounds the vicious circle of a subject-centered discourse. This performative condition also accounts for the optimistic possibility of alteration and discontinuity in subject formation. This formulation of interpellation on the basis of the iteration of subjects shows how agency may well consist in transforming and refusing the conditions of their emergence (29), thus disrupting the notion of the psyche, underpinned by Althusser and Foucault, as an exterior frame that self-disciplines and imprisons the body. The production of incoherent and aberrant identities for Butler indicates that the operation of power on the formation of the psyche does not have a totalizing effect, therefore locating the psyche back in the unconscious and interlinking it with the social practice of regulation.

Noela Davis's approach to Althusser's text however argues that Butler's interpolation of the performative theory of subjectivity into Althusser and Foucault's texts is indicative of their overall investment in the "coercive nature of

the norms that constitute us (that is, name or authorize us and make us intelligible) and at the same time constrain us" (2012, 885). This theoretical direction, I agree, is reiterated in most of Butler's distinguished works on gender, heteronormativity and subversion and non-complicity with hegemonic norms. A reading of Foucault and Althusser's texts, according to Davis, however indicates that their explanation of subject formation does not rely on coercion, guilt and punitive force for its functionality. Instead, Foucault's and Althusser's subject-formation relies on a mutuality between ideology and materiality to constitute the subject into constituted members of their society (888). Davis argues that Foucault's power is more an instrument of subject constitution than subject repression as Butler visualizes: "The significance of the suggestion that we are always-already implicated within the values and norms of our particular place and time is that we 'obey', not because we are compelled, but because these are our constitutive conditions. We performatively re-enact this constitution as we materialize our social/ideological environment. It is thus not a question of obedience or submission" (891). This, according to Davis, makes Foucault's a more welcoming and positively oriented view on subject-formation than Butler's "grim and ground-down" vision of subjectivity (896).

While Davis's re-reading of Althusser's essay and Butler's account of Althusser's work is inarguably a useful way of pursuing a comprehensive scope of power and subjection, I argue that Butler's theory of power is much more suited and specific to the theorization of Black women's subjectivity. As Davis themselves note, Althusser's system of power-ideology does not assert that there can be no negative outcome, in the form of producing a subject that is insignificant. What Althusser's theory does is cover the spectrum of possibilities—from legitimized to dominated subjectivity (896). I argue that the "grim and ground-down subjects of Butler's vision" that Davis argues we are not necessarily made of (896), is in fact a vision of Black women's subjectivity, making Butler's theory indispensable to the analysis of the Black women's fractured subjectivity. I argue that for Black women who on account of the combination of their race and gender, suffer systematic oppression, power subordinates us, and if at all it constitutes us like Althusser's theory posits, then it constitutes us again in subjection to dominant norms, rituals, and values we did not contribute to instituting. Butler's argument that forms of resistance exhibited by subjects in a society compromises any endeavor to contextualize an enigmatic and taken-for-granted theory of power, shows a fit with the theorization of Black women as an oppressed and Othered category,

who according to Michelle Wright, can only come into being through the "introduction of dialogic structure of subjectivity" (2004, 4).

My commitment to using Butler's psychoanalytic power theory is further substantiated by Maria R. Markus's and David Lloyd's arguments in their respective essays "Cultural Pluralism and the Subversion of the 'Taken-for-granted' World" and "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?". Markus, in analyzing the political culture of nation-states, argues that the pre-reflexive layer that produces the "intellectually and reflectively generated systems of beliefs, norms, and organized traditions (moral maps), providing evaluative standards for different modes of life or their components" within the newly constructed nation-states, is permanently shattered for groups with the history of colonization (2002, 392). In parallel with Markus's argument, Lloyd also holds that the discourse of subjectivity in both Western and previously colonized countries must be engaged with differently. According to Lloyd, in contrast to Western states, the production and emergence of an "ethical subject" (i.e., one whose subject-formation is produced through its own relational consent to disciplinary institutions and who retains the agency to suspend its immediate interests in the service of a well-regulated society), is unrealized in colonial and postcolonial contexts as a result of the historical exercise of and contemporary presence of racialized coercive violence (2000, 217). Using Butler's analysis of how the subject is formed in submission because of the psychic form that power takes, I conclude, move Black women (who are used to being omitted from normalizing discourses) from the margin to the center. It allows for a critical interrogation of an Othered subjectivity that is most often neglected or treated as a peripheral—a possible collateral damage.

1.3 Misogynoir: The Paradox of Black Women's Invisibility and Hypervisibility

The term misogynoir was coined and developed by the Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey in her contribution to an online blog under the alias Moyazb. In her contribution titled "They aren't talking about me", Bailey discusses the pervasive misogyny and sexism in musical contents. She mentions in a footnote that the term misogynoir serves to describe the "particular brand of hatred directed at Black women in American visual and popular culture" (Moyazb, 2010). The struggle to find an expression to discuss Black women's experience with gender generated the concept of misogynoir. In a 2018 commentary by Bailey

and Trudy, Bailey further explains that "naming misogynoir was about noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intra-racial gender dynamic that had wider implications in popular culture" (762). Stereotypes about Black women that circulated in popular culture impacted educational environments and always "ended up leading to ideas about Black women that negatively impacted their care" (762). By coining a new word entirely to describe the specific anti-Black racist misogyny experienced by only Black women, Bailey hopes to "engender more specificity in gender studies scholarship", and to develop a new interpretive framework that can attend to the realities of Black women and "expand the theoretical possibilities" of gender discourse (2013, 342).

Another Black feminist unaffiliated scholar, whose name is also associated with the expansion and application of misogynoir across contexts, is Trudy. She explains in the commentary that her introduction to the term on the online blog Crunk Feminist Collective in 2011 would be instrumental in her investigation into the impact of misogynoir on "relationships, entertainment and institutional violence" (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 763). Trudy's theorization of misogynoir gives additional clarity to the difference between intersectionality and misogynoir. Accordingly, she clarifies that "if intersectionality explains how Black women experience race, gender and class differently from Whites/men, then misogynoir explains why this occurs" (766). In other words, it explains how everything Black women do is used either for exploitative purposes against them or weaponized to deny them their humanity (766). Trudy believes that the treatment meted out to Black women embodies the "contempt that people have for womanhood", and that putting an end to racism and sexism without capitalism "can guarantee that Black women would still experience misogynoir" (767) because of the ways people think of Blackness itself.

In her piece on misogynoir published in 2014 on her online space Grandient Lair, she explains misogynoir as:

> specifically Black women's experiences with gender and how both racism and anti-Blackness alters that experience diametrically from white women [as anti-Blackness and white supremacy make white women the "norm" in terms of intersectional experiences with gender, even as solely via gender, misogyny harms all women) and differently from non-Black women of colour (although they face racism, the dehumanization associated with anti-Blackness is more than racism or sexualized objectification alone, but

speaks to the history of Black bodies and lives treated as those of non-persons] (Trudy).

Trudy insists on a distinction between "Black women" and "women of color" with the argument that these identifiers overlap "only because Black women can be considered women of color" alongside other non-Black women of color, although one must not be used as synonym for another (Trudy). Thus, while the former is a racial classification engendered by "stereotypes, violence, oppression and dehumanization unique to Black women's bodies, experiences, lives and histories, the latter is a political identity of theoretical solidarity of non-white women" brought by the aftermath of "white supremacy, racism and white privilege on non-white women" (Trudy). Trudy's elaboration of the term beyond its application within pop culture provides insight into how Black women experience gender differently and establishes a backdrop for further interrogation. For Black women, the performance of their gender is inherently flawed because of anti-Blackness. Thus, even though white women experience general misogyny, they, based on an established binary with Black women, represent good womanhood in ways that are unachievable for Black women. Black women are either forcefully masculinized and regarded as "non-women" or hyper-sexualized and reduced to sexual objects with "non-person status" (Trudy). These two occurrences, which might be considered empowering or a simple case of objectification for white women and women of color when viewed from the lens of whiteness, are much more nuanced for Black women. These stereotypes do more than insult and objectify Black women. They are weaponized to "reify the non-human status of Black women" when set in opposition to white women, a position even "non-Black women of color are placed 'above' even as they are placed 'below' white women (Trudy). These weaponized stereotypes, according to Trudy, extend beyond interracial contexts, due to "an interracial value system that mirrors external oppressors", with the consequence that the humanity of Black women is challenged by Black men, who enjoy male privilege even as they experience anti-Blackness and racism, and by Black people, in general. By implication, this pairing and juxtaposition creates a hyper-visible reality for Black women, who are constantly judged and watched because of their perceived difference.

In Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", we see up close the historic conditions that create the absolute annihilation of the Black female subject that Moya Bailey and Trudy contrive of as misogynoir. Spillers argues that whatever privilege granted to the patriarchal-

ized white female gender is denied enslaved African women because of the profiteering economy that the Atlantic slave trade was established upon. According to Spillers, the severe torture and dehumanization of the African female subject without consideration for her femininity—the same femininity granted protection under the male-dominant European civilization—reveals the profiteering objective of the transatlantic slave trade (1983, 68). The entire captive community perceived only as means to generate phenomenal wealth suffers under the "powers of distortion that the dominant community seizes as its unlawful prerogative"; after which they lose any sense of differentiation they might have enjoyed under their own cultural system as well as under the dominant cultural system (69). Directly following from her submission that African women's gendered annihilation is deeply tied to profit, Spillers goes on to discuss a few of the dehumanizing procedures that was deployed on the "captive flesh" of the African female subject, and "thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases", which has any kind of gender distinction embarked upon after the end of slavery useless (68). A few of these ungendering procedures are medical experimentation, sexual violence and rape, work not limited to domestic spaces, and dispossession of the right to motherhood. Against this historical background provided by Spillers, Trudy's insistence on the differentiation in Black women's (non)gendered lived reality becomes clearer.

Equally evident in Black feminist scholarship is the space for translocation. This translocation is also evident in Trudy's perceptive conceptualization and recognition that misogynoir is not and should not be limited to Black women's experiences within the US because "anti-Blackness, sexism and misogyny have a global impact for Black women" beyond the singularity of the Western kind of white supremacy and American kind of racism (Trudy). Because of the specific nature of Black people's protracted struggle against colonial domination and the impact of white epistemology on other societal fabrics, it is notwithstanding pertinent to critically interrogate the manifestation of misogynoir even in spaces where white supremacy is not directly "visible in local culture and power" (Trudy). Oda-Kange Midtvage Diallo's project on racialization within and outside Danish academia reveals that Black women have a need to create their own safe space due to the erasure of racial discourse from the social fabric of Denmark. According to her ethnographic study, all the participants felt "relieved that they were finally able to voice their experiences in the company of other Black women" (Diallo, 2019, 219). I argue that excluding race and Blackness from national discussion by practicing a colorblind approach to discourses of classifications even though Black women's experiences are "shaped

by hidden colonial processes which influence the fabric of their blackness" (218), is a pattern of anti-Blackness practiced by hegemonic Western institutions and spaces. This racializing gaze and preconditions attached to the Black female body "requires a performance, as well as a constant neglect of one's self" (227), to embody Blackness in a "specific sense of the word, regardless of your own interpretation of Black embodiment" (227).

For Black women, I argue that these preconditions and racializing gaze most often can blur the social categorizations that create overlapping systems of privileges enjoyed by white women. By being denied the discussion of racism, Black women are also denied the possibility of defining themselves. In spaces that are historically white, male and center a white and masculinist worldview, reproducing specific criteria for access and acceptance, the mere presence of a Black female body is "almost impossible" and can lead to invisibility or hyper-visibility "for the few who manage to enter these spaces" (220). The acceptance of a few others into historically white spaces, Diallo argues, is most often a way to exercise diversity, "while maintaining privilege, power and the ability to define valid knowledge production" (220). Black women are from a young age forced to reflect upon their "identity and bodily representation" in ways that white women are not required to do. This hyperawareness, according to Diallo, is a direct consequence of the "specifically gendered racism that Black women experience, also called misogynoir" (220).

1.4   The Racial Dynamics of Black Women's Femicide

In this section, I draw out the intersectional dimensions of the theoretical concept of femicide for the purpose of interrogating the intersectional characteristics of the lethal violence experienced by Black women as represented in my selected texts. My intersectional interrogation rests on my argument that Black women's experiences of violence carry different historical legacies due to the two-tier system that treats white bodies differently from Black bodies. I argue that discussing femicide without analyzing the impact of competing patriarchal power structures on the aliveness and femicide of Black women will contribute to the essentialism of the victims of this form of fatal crime. An intersectional approach makes it possible to link the femicide of Black women to the historical legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and address "the racist femicide of Black women by white men and the existence of sexual violence and femicide within Black communities" (Radford 1992, 8). This is even more im-

portant because of the stereotype continuously perpetuated by Western feminist scholarship based on colonial narratives that female oppression in Black communities is homogeneously produced, and 'third world' women are situated within pathological oppressive and misogynistic social practices, which they must be rescued from (Mohanty 2002, 2003 and Radford 1992). To this end, I aim to contribute to the discussion on this concept from an intersectional feminist approach by discussing the intersection of femicide, which affects Black women because of the combination of their race and gender.

Femicide was first introduced by the American feminist, Diana E. H. Russell. She used the term during her testimony before the 1976 International Tribunal on Crimes against women and implied it as the misogynist murders of women and girls perpetrated by men (2011b). The definition since then has undergone numerous changes by Russell herself. Her final definition delimits it as "the killing of females by males because they are female" (2011b). Russell draws attention to how ingrained prejudice against women visibly maps the margin of women's murder at the hands of men. Importantly, the backdrop against which Russell frames and explores this specific social phenomenon requires that it is named and theorized. As she maintains, the vast majority of all murders of women are femicides. Even if men are murdered more frequently than women are, their murder is rarely motivated by ingrained prejudice against them in comparison to the murder of women at the hands of men. In contrast, the relatively few women who murder men are usually motivated by self-defense (2011a).

Further elaborating on the distinctiveness of femicide, Jane Caputi and Diana Russell describe the misogynous killing of women as the "most extreme form of sexist terrorism, motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women" (1992, 15). Rooting their analysis in sexist cultures that are central to the preservation of hetero-patriarchy, they undergird the dimensions of violence within a form of sexual violence:

> Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly in prostitution), incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office, and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynaecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood (by criminalizing contraception and abortion),

psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides (15).

This definition makes it clear that femicide not only addresses overt one-on-one sexist murders, but also includes covert forms of the killing of females that is informed by misogynistic social values and laws. Focusing on the social control function of these murders unveils the misogynist motivations of these killings and separates femicide from other non-gendered murders. More so, locating femicide within the "continuum of sexual violence" (4) allows for the coverage and connection of a range of coercive heterosexual experiences, that move beyond "legal discourse that is based on discrete and narrow definitions of the sexual and the violent, definitions that can distort and deny women's experience" (3).

Judith Butler, in an interview with George Yancy, describes femicide as not just murder that is committed because of gender, but a form of violence against femininity and feminized bodies. This is especially noteworthy because of the specific violence also committed against trans women. Butler construes this violence as one that first establishes the femininity of the victim before it is unleashed, thereby securing "the class of women as killable, dispensable", articulating the existence of women as a masculine prerogative (Butler 2019). Since Russell laid the foundation for the understanding and dissection of the violent death of women, which before had been invisible and summed up under the general-neutral terms murder or homicide (2011a), a few researchers have analyzed femicide from various approaches. However, there has been limited discussions of femicide in feminist literature, despite the extremity of this form of sexual violence. This theoretical limitation, Jill Radford argues, might be due to the finality of death, which does not accommodate the women involved to share their experiences, placing femicide "outside traditional feminist modes of working" (1992, 4). Unfortunately, feminist silence, "however understandable, leaves it open to justification or denial by the larger culture" (5).

Corradi Consuelo et al. document and review the five theoretical approaches researchers have followed in their inquiry into femicide, one of which is the decolonial approach. This approach championed by decolonial feminist researchers as they apply to Black women is central to my analysis because it endeavors to examine the concept of femicide beyond the single narrative of heteropatriarchy. In addressing femicide within colonial contexts, Consuelo et al. argue that an awareness of the complexities and contribution

of "politics, economic disadvantage, racism and spatial segregation" must be established (2016, 983). Notably, only a fair amount has been written on the dimensions of Black women's femicide globally. In Shatema Threadcraft's essay "Making Black Femicide Visible", Threadcraft argues that Black American women, although three to four times more likely to experience high rates of lethal violence than women of other groups, with the exception of Native women, struggle with spotlighting their experience. This is due to the overall sexist social order that diminishes issues related to women, together with anti-Black racism that perpetuates bias against their cry for help (2021). In Threadcraft's words: "The violence Black women experience is less visible because it does not always look like the violence white women experience and white women have had greater power in narrating the story of gender-based violence (39). Floretta A. Boonzaier, for example, centers her analysis on the prevalent rate of women being murdered in South Africa, with the argument that "racist sexualization, derogatory representations of Black bodies, notions about morality, respectability, and legitimized suffering" tend to contextualize the crime, beyond simple heteropatriarchy (2022, 4). Boonzaier argues that for South Africa, with its history of apartheid as the foundational framing of its nation-state, there is a longer history of settler colonialism and slavery that provides an important, much deeper and necessary contextualization of the contemporary movement (4).

In "Who's Killing Us?" Jaime, M. Grant focuses on the 1979 rape and murder of 12 young African American and one white woman in Boston, Massachusetts. In examining the public and legal discourse surrounding the case, Grant draws out the intersectional dimension of violence against African American women and the responses from within and outside the community. Grant describes how the white feminist women who protested these deaths alongside Black women, analyzed their grief within the general culture "in which violence against women was condoned and, at times, glorified" (1992, 146), while Black men activists centered their activism around racial violence, completely ignoring the sexual politics of the murders (147). For Black feminists, situating these murders within a monolithic power structure did not capture the multilayered complexities of their situation, especially because media coverage was practically non-existent and hostile to the Black community's criticism, exemplifying the racist-sexist aspect of their oppression (150–151). This dissatisfaction propelled the Black feminist collective to draft their own pamphlet, illuminating their own standpoint on the femicides. The pamphlet served as an external indication to "mainstream institutions that their inadequate

coverage and response to the murders was unacceptable" (150). It is through the convergence of these public and legal discourses concerning the murders of these Black women, that the marginalization of Black women is revealed.

The racial dimension of femicide in relation to structural counteraction is further amplified in Diana Russell and Elli Ellis's "Annihilation by Murder and by the Media: The Other Atlanta Femicides. By contrasting police's response to the investigation of the murders of both 34 Black women and 26 Black men, they capture the complicity of the criminal justice system in the femicides of Black women in US-America. According to Russell and Candida, the intensification of public pressure on the police to bring the killer(s) of the 26 murdered African American males was not applied in regard to the female victims. This indifference to the femicides of Black women "exposes the complicity of both racism and sexism" (1992, 162) that African American males regardless of their oppressed status do not experience. Russell and Ellis conclude that there is a form of complicity between those who previously condemned official indifference to the deaths of young African American males and those who hold African American lives cheap, and this unity is why "racist sexism, or sexist racism, continues to flourish in the United States" (162).

As such, according to the Southhall Black Sisters, the struggle for and advocacy of Black women is often fraught with contradictions. For Black people in the United Kingdom, the police have "always represented the mostly repressive face of a racist state" (1992, 313). The Southhall Black Sisters describe how the racist-sexist dimension of Black women's femicide render their struggle and advocacy particularly vulnerable to contradictions that are not present in white feminism.

> Ironically, for Black women, in the face of harassment, intimidation and violence from our communities, the police have continued to be the only agency to whom we are forced to turn for immediate help. The majority of women have no faith or confidence in the police, but because of a lack of any alternative, women have had no choice but to make demands for protection and safety from them. For Black women, challenging an issue like domestic violence within our own communities and challenging the racism of the police at the same time is often fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, we are involved in campaigns against police brutality, deaths in police custody and immigration fishing raids. On the other, we are faced with daily beatings, rape and sexual harassment. We are forced to make demands of the police to protect our lives from the very same men along whose side we fight in anti-racist struggles. The struggle against racism cannot be waged at the ex-

pense of the struggles within a male-dominated and patriarchal community whose traditions and customs confine the woman to the home and deny her the right to determine who she wants to live with and how. Many of us feel that to make this struggle secondary to the struggle against racism means at best to ignore women's experiences and at worst to passively collude with those patriarchal practices. Instead, our view is that somehow both struggles have to be waged simultaneously without losing sight of the consequences each can have on the other. Our demands must take both struggles into account (313).

Further elaborating on the intersectionality of Black women's femicide, Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against women of Color" presents a clear example of how race and gender makes women of color's experience of domestic violence and rape qualitatively different from white women, and how this experiential difference has functioned to erase them from both feminist and antiracist politics. In Crenshaw's brief study of battered women's shelters located in minority communities in Los Angeles, she observes that the situation of these women is a manifestation of "the multilayered and routinised forms of domination" that converge to keep them trapped in their "abusive relationships that brought them to shelters in the first place" (1995, 358). Even though there are multiple frameworks through which violence against women of color can be explained, Crenshaw makes the decision to focus on the intersections of race and gender because they act as primary sites for the manifestation of the subordination Black women experience. Crenshaw highlights several sites where structures of power intersect to subjugate Black women. These sites range from poverty, childcare responsibilities, access to employment, housing, wealth, and language barriers to immigration status for immigrant women. She stresses that strategies employed to combat these problems must be shaped by the particular experiences and needs of these women (360).

Crenshaw draws out some of the shortcoming of antiracist politics in addressing domestic violence against Black women, arguing that rhetorical strategies of anti-racist politics, in "attempts to maintain the integrity of the community," (361) often aim at suppressing the domestic violence suffered by Black women within the Black community. Another strategy within antiracist discourse is "to regard the problem of violence against women of color as just another manifestation of racism," (362) even though the violence suffered by Black women is more complex and extends beyond this monolithic narrative.

This deliberate decision to obscure women of color's abuse, Crenshaw argues, is also encouraged by Black women's reluctance to involve the police in their private lives, due to their lack of trust in the criminal justice system. "In many cases, the desire to protect the home as a safe haven against assaults outside the home may make it more difficult for women of color to seek protection against assaults from within the home" (362). Crenshaw concludes that challenging the contradictions present in Black women's lives is a never-ending-process of identity politics, and that Black women "need not await the ultimate triumph over racism before they can expect to live violence-free lives" (363).

It is not a coincidence that I employ multidisciplinary theories as analytic tools for my fictional exploration of Black women's reality. I do this for the purpose of offering interdisciplinary perspectives from which the intersectional complexities of Black women's reality can be unraveled. That majority of these theories used in my work are generated by Black women and women of color is fundamental to my research, because it is my primary objective that my analytic tools reflect informed engagement. Additionally, it is my view in agreement with Patricia Hill Collins that these theories applied to Black women's issues, due to the delimitation of their concerns, must simultaneously engage in deconstructing mainstream scholarships and producing new versions of truth. For the purpose of clarity, rather than use a lengthy approach to my analysis, I have chosen to engage with my theoretical frameworks in sub-sections notwithstanding their convergence. In the last decades, a significant number of Black feminist movements have emerged and gained momentum across the continents. These movements share a common goal; to reconstruct the experiences of Black women within and outside African social structures through theory and intellectualism, making it reasonable to argue that these theories and methodologies are derivatives of one another. The majority of theoretical contributions to my book critically engage with the gap in Black liberation politics and traditional feminist movements, developing new methodologies and theories to engage with the discourse of power and oppression.

2. Literary Interview as a Dialogic Form of 'Outsider Within' Portrait

I hypothesized in my introduction that African female diasporic writers, who have a history and reputation of summoning critiques of hegemonic white and male-centered subject formation in their creative works, continue to tease out these nuances and fallacies, and problematize the experience of Otherness and the kaleidoscope of oppression in their contemporary literary works. Simply put, what this implies is that there is a commonality of heterogeneous narratives to be found in the creative works of African women writers in the diaspora, and this common consciousness is interwoven with their personal biographies as African and women, involved in the continuous struggle against the hegemony of whiteness and maleness in the global sphere. Although my dissertation is focused on the novels written by these authors, I reason that it is nevertheless essential for the self-reflexive authority of my research to address this simplistic hypothesis, which is rife with oversimplified deterministic assumptions and implications that a number of African writers have criticized in retrospect. To show this hypothetical dialogical relationship between text and context, I engage with the literary interviews granted by the writers of my selected works about their creative works and writing life.

Literary interviews have grown to become an acceptable component of literary analysis both in the classroom and research domain. According to Bruce Bawer in a 1988 article "The Literary Life: Talk Show: The Rise of Literary Interview", the literary interview, which were "all but unheard of in the pages of serious journals" (422) in America, became popular in the 1980s and have "continued to increase in prominence" (428). Since gaining recognition, the literary interview has become a big part of Western research tradition as is evident in an article by Anneleen Masschelein et al. that bring together French, English, and German research works that have been carried out on the literary interview (2014). In inquiring into the delineation of the literary interview,

Masschelein et al. appear to suggest that the literary interview is a hybrid genre that belongs to both the media and literary domains for several functional reasons that cover the gamut of publicity and publicly aligned discourses (1–2). Based on their analysis of a diverse range of research works, they reach a conclusion that although research about the literary interview is disproportional to its prominence, the literary interview as a literary form has been predominantly researched from specific perspectives by French, English and German researchers. These perspectives are historical, national, autobiographical, oral literature, and feminism. While the review of literature shows that the literary interview has evolved from a "peripheral phenomenon or a source of information about the authors" to something of an autonomous genre, they opine that it is nevertheless still difficult for scholars to draw strict conclusions or classify it as one (17). The closest to an agreement on classification most scholars have been able to reach is that it can be classified as a hybrid genre, simultaneously "belonging to multiple fields of discourse" and fulfilling certain preconditions such as authorship, staged dialogue, transcription and publishing, interaction of selves that bear resemblances to literary creation, and reinforcing a sense of authenticity and intimacy that partly eludes literature (20). These preconditions allow for the acceptance of the literary interview into the domain of literature as well as create recurring tensions that have come to characterize its incorporation into contemporary literary cultures (20).

While Masschelein et al. show that extensive investigation within Western scholarship has been done into the function and classification of the literary interview in hegemonic literary traditions (English, French, German), John A. Stotesbury posits that the literary interviews of African writers, though often cited in the field of Western scholarship in African literatures, remain largely uninvestigated for its "aims, content, strategies and critical exploitation" (1998, 28). Using the literary interviews three East African writers granted to him at a writers' conference in 1986, and their dissatisfaction with their oeuvre portrayed in the final edited version, Stotesbury asks critical questions on the textual status of the literary interview in the study of African literature that according to him, has not been satisfactorily probed. Should the literary interview made with African writers be treated on a basic level, as a means of "accumulating extra biographical data straight from the horse's mouth?" or "enhancing the exposure of writers in the literary marketplace?" (29). In examining the mobility of the literary interview in academic literary criticism, Stotesbury reaches similar conclusion with Masschelein et al. that "it appears virtually impossible to find any discussion of the textual status of the literary inter-

view—whether, for instance it can be regarded not only as a *metatext* but also, perhaps, in some circumstances as a potential *paratext*, that is, a kind of half-way house functioning both as a critical text and as a semi-autonomous literary text produced in collaboration with the interviewer" (29). What one finds instead is a "take-it-for-granted, common-sense attitude to the published literary interview" (30). The attitude being Eurocentric critical perspective and literary theories used as universal theories to study the published literary interview "in the study of writing from other cultures, especially African" (30). This is in line with Mineke Schippe's argument that universal as has been used in the literary context, or the notion of literary as meaning the same everywhere and carrying a universal definition has most followers in Eurocentric circles, with 'universal' often turning out to mean a synonym or euphemism for 'Western' (1990, 24).

In light of the background of Stotesbury's essay, which is the dissatisfaction expressed by three East African writers with the final edited and published product of their literary interviews, Stotesbury believes that there is the challenge of dislocation between a writer and a critical reader or interviewer from another cultural tradition, which the field of Western scholarship in African literatures seems insistent on minimizing. While Stotesbury in answering the questions presented in his essay, pursues a systematic analysis of interviewer versus interviewee cross-cultural relations, not relevant to my contrivance of the dialogical relationship that exist between texts of African female writers and context, his questions and observations remain valid, especially in light of Western dominance in existing literary theories and traditions (Schipper 1990, James 1990). I, thus, posit that the paratextual relevance of the literary interviews with African female diasporic writers in relation to the literary analysis of Black women's systemic oppression needs to be emphasized especially, where literary tradition, research, criticism, and education is bedeviled with an enduring power factor like that pointed out by Mineke Schipper:

> The transfer of Western literary values to other cultural contexts has been a fact of life for a very long time. In the eyes of researchers from these cultures, this may have had some advantages, but it has also been damaging. Many discussions on this subject have been taking place since the sixties and seventies, particularly in countries that have experienced Western colonialism. However, these discussions have hardly penetrated the walls of European schools and universities. Do Western scholars know, for example, that more than once the question has been asked outside of Europe whether a West-

erner is at all capable of studying other literatures? Perhaps they just shrug their shoulders at what seems such an impertinent question, but maybe it is pertinent after all to ask what is behind that question (1990, 21).

Given the tensions that complicate the literary interview and its deployment in literary analysis of any kind, Adeola James's position on the paratextual relevance of the literary interview to the discussion of African women's lives as represented through literature is instructive here. In a departure from the literary interview as a hybrid genre posited by Masschelein et al., James believes that the literary interview with African women writers, on account of their erasure from the subject of history and creative writing, offers a counter-discursive advantage, and holds more intersubjective usefulness for the critical analysis of their works (1990, 3). In the introduction to her influential anthology of interviews with fifteen African women writers, James narrates her discovery: "What I discovered in the course of conversation was that for these writers, the intensity of their lives and commitment is lived at all levels and finally rendered to us in their works. One cannot ultimately distinguish the literary from the political and this is reflected in the interviews" (5). James admonishes that while we do not have to lose sight of the fact that literature is only but representation, and literary analysis an examination of texts, the literary interview of African women writers could "enhance our understanding and appreciation of [African women's] creative works" (3).

In a manner consonant with James's admonition, I mention that my analytical approach is not to be taken to the extreme, in that we reckon that all fictions written by Black women must contain traces of sociocultural phenomena and be limited to their sociocultural resistance or be a perfect rendition of reality with no room for literary freedom. Rather, I incorporate authorial interviews based on my abstraction of what I like to call the responsibility and accountability of literary scholarship. I posit that *weltanschauung* hierarchy heavily influences both writers and readers, and one of the consequences for writers with marginalized identities might look like having an acute awareness of centers and margins and needing to remark on where they and the ontologies, codes, signs, and epistemologies employed in their creative process be classified. This is also not to surmise that authorial interview dominates the reading and interpretation of a text in radical ways that regulate textual interpretation and shifts exclusive power to an author.

Additionally, as a conscious reader involved in the process of critical deconstruction, of brainstorming on the difference between reading versus sifting

through details to understand a text, engaging with authorial interviews is a start to using literature to study Black women's lived reality and how my interpretation develops. Thus, my objective is to acknowledge my selected novels in the context of work produced by authors belonging to marginalized and minoritized groups, establish a correlation between these texts and the discursive spaces in which they are produced, and still make room for textual interpretive freedom. To paraphrase, I employ a dialogical approach, reading the novels alongside networks of interviews conducted by the authors. I regard these interviews as paratextual messages that advance the understanding and interpretation of my texts. In effect, the reading of these interviews as indispensable paratexts furnish my selected novels with layers of meanings, hence making the reading process an interactive endeavor between me as a reader-critic, the authors, their novels, and the discursive spaces in which they are produced, with the consequence that the interpretation of the diegesis of the novels are limitless yet rooted in understanding Black women's lived reality.

Tsitsi Dangarembga, my first author is a Zimbabwean novelist, playwright, and filmmaker. Born in 1959 in Mukoto, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), she has been nominated several times and won several awards for her literary and film contribution to these discursive fields respectively. She moved with her parents to the United Kingdom where she spent a huge part of her childhood before returning to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1965 to complete her A levels. She later travelled back to the UK in 1977 to study medicine at the University of Cambridge but returned home shortly in 1980 due to experiences of racism and alienation, which she alluded to in several of her interviews. Her first novel in the trilogy, *Nervous Conditions*, was published in 1988, followed by the sequel, *The Book of Not* in 2006 and the third novel, *This Mournable Body* in 2018. In 1989, she travelled to Germany to study film making at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin, produced a number of films while located in Berlin, later received her PhD in African studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin, moved back to Zimbabwe in 2000, became involved in politics and got arrested in July 2020 due to her participation in an anti-corruption protest (Steffes-Halmer 2022).

In a similar vein with the thematic preoccupations of *The Book of Not*, interviews conducted with Tsitsi Dangarembga consistently demonstrate her earnestness about the psychological condition of African women caught in the shadow of colonial and post-colonial disruptive apartheid structures (Dangarembga 1993, 2006, 2007, 2013 and 2019). Describing her experiences of Otherness in England, Germany, and Zimbabwe respectively, she spot-

lights the internalized (psychic) character of the white supremacist structures of domination that is duplicated in Zimbabwe. Using a female character to explore this intersectional system of domination, from recognizing her existence as shaped by poverty, assimilated into the impartial possibility of success, and then coming into an awareness of the limitation imposed on her Black femaleness, Dangarembga purposed to capture the danger of thinking of freedom in single dimensional relations. Finding the language to dramatize the absurdities of white supremacist practices, which the female character is impacted by and entangled with, might be considered a challenging, traumatic task, but one which Dangarembga chooses to pursue because of her lived reality of being a Black African woman in colonial Rhodesia, postcolonial Zimbabwe, and the West: "I realize that creative women often do not fit easily into certain paradigms. I think to myself. Then where do they go? Where do they go? Because I feel that these women have so much to contribute, that they just see things in a different way. Every society has people like that and marginalizes them in some way. So its's a very difficult situation" (Dangarembga 2013). Introducing new Black female voices and subjectivities was Dangarembga's way of interrogating and bringing visibility to Black women's obscured experiences of much of the history of Zimbabwe and the oppression wrought by patriarchy and colonialism on African women. Dangarembga's first novel, *Nervous Conditions* described as the first novel to be published by a Black Zimbabwean woman (2007), endured its own share of belittlement and near-erasure. Dangarembga divulges the difficulty of getting her novel published in Zimbabwe four years after the writing completion because editors were unwilling to engage with her voice and "most of the publishing houses at that time have young black men who have been outside the country writing and then came back and became the editors" (2013).

For Dangarembga, her marginalization and near-erasure are potent reminders of how the intersectionality of colonial practices such as the negation of colonized peoples' identities and many more resultant traumas of fragmentations continue to haunt post-colonized Zimbabwean women and their global future. Using Black female character(s) becomes an outlet to tell the story of the "kinds of divisions", "horrible brutality on both sides", the silence and denial of the colonial and anti-colonial violence amongst other things that plagued the country into the 1990s, and how women, despite and because of the layers to their disadvantages, find ways to negotiate and live within the system (2013). Explaining why she centered her story around the issues of gender and race inequality through the lens of a young schoolgirl in *Nervous Condition* and *The Book*

of Not, she comments: "Because at the end of the 1990s, the whole land issue came up in Zimbabwe. We were looking at about 80 percent of the land being owned by about 20 percent of the population, which brought back the issues of racism, imbalance, and inequality" and "Tambudzai was a very appropriate character for me to explore what is happening underneath that happy African surface" (2013).

An attention to Dangarembga's literary interviews reveals her intention to express in *The Book of Not*, the ideological struggles that continue to negatively impact the Zimbabwean society. In contrast, the writerly consciousness of the novel consistently indicates that there is a discourse beyond the fabula, a particular kind of dialogue between the larger socio-cultural textuality and the narrative text that cannot be completely separated from each other. A focus on the "complexities of the politics of postcolonial subjecthood" disrupts the previous male and white authored simplistic framing of postcolonial versus global struggles (Dangarembga 1993, 309). Even though in an earlier interview (1993), she stresses that her thinking and exploration of the world as it is informed by power has expanded from an exclusive gendered relational dimension to comprehensive interactive components, she comments in a later interview in 2006 that her lived reality as African and woman continues to be the inspiration for her intellectual works. The convergence of white supremacy and patriarchy in her intimate oppression, in addition to witnessing the similarities and differences in "these two systems of oppression" would have her "spend a lot more time and energy trying to tease out which oppression fits" so it can be combatted appropriately and left as "a legacy for others" with similar burdens (2006, 2). Viewed in this way, within the system of white supremacist patriarchal tension in which the novel is produced, the novel can neither be read as an independent narrative, nor can the literary interviews of Dangarembga be seen as an irrelevant paratextual material.

My second novel, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, which fictionalizes seven generations of characters all connected to a family tree in Ghana, has been classified in a few of the author's interviews as a "history of sorts" (Gyasi 2016, 2). The novel, which might first comes across as a labyrinthine historical chronicle of African lives impacted by the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and institutional racism in the US, is also about self-discovery and resilience of the Black diasporic community. Yaa Gyasi, whose parents come from Ghana and moved to the United States when she was two, accredits the thematic resonance of identity in the novel to her hyphenated identity. Having a hyphenated identity yet comprehending these identities in a different way from her parents

and also from Black or African Americans would haunt a major part of her developmental stage, leaving more questions than answers: "And, you know, I'm Ghanaian, but I grew up in America, so my relationship to what it means to be black is completely different than that of my parents" (4). Confounded for the most part by her intersectional marginal identity, Gyasi remarks in a series of her interviews that *Homegoing* is an attempt to reclaim a narrative and amplify the voices of people who have been historically silenced, have had their stories never told from their own perspective, and treated as inferior subjects in narratives by white and male authors: "I was writing for myself, and thinking through a lot of these issues, my troubles with racial and ethnic identity. And not understanding where I fit in. And this map is a map that lives inside my head at all times" (2016, 9). Writing for Gyasi as an immigrant Black woman writer becomes even much more important that carving her craft around Black people across the diaspora in the historical context of the subjugation of Black people becomes a necessity.

For Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, her literary works according to several of her commentaries, speak to her enduring consideration and interest in the experiences of women and other marginalized identities. *Americanah*, a fictional work traversing several decades, countries, themes and characters can be said to be an interrogation of two cultures, one superordinate and the other subordinate, often at odds with each other. In the majority of Adichie's interviews, the consciousness that boldly reverberates through is that her storytelling is borne of a cautious observation and discontentment with social conventions. Adichie, who does not shy away from speaking her mind and has been internationally recognized for her candor as well as critiqued for a few of her gender-critical feminist opinions, describes her novels as realistic fiction: "I write realistic fiction, and so it isn't that surprising that social realities of their existence would be part of the story. I don't believe that art and politics or social issues must be separated" (Adichie 2013, 3). Adichie's revelation that creative writing for her entails using "surface details of [her] own life in [her] fiction" makes the text much more personal (3). One learns an important thing, which is that not only does *Americanah* focus on social issues, but the novel is also conceived from a dialogical dimension and motivated by her dissatisfaction with so many things: "I am deeply dissatisfied – about so many things, about injustice, about the way the world works – and in some ways, my dissatisfaction drives my storytelling" (3). To engage with *Americanah* is to engage with it as a work of fiction free from fixed interpretations and as a socio-historical literary text containing ideological structures and struggles.

Adichie travelled to the United States at the age of nineteen for her university education and has since then made the place her residence. Travelling to the US, she claims, would cause a huge shift in her identity and she would have to "learn what it means to be black in America" (2). To be suddenly burdened by this strange construct and having to learn new ways of being, opened and at the same time closed possibilities for her racial-gendered identities. These experiences would form the basis of *Americanah*. For instance, a part of the story centers on the protagonist's natural Black hair, journey of self-love and acceptance for her hair. That the word 'natural' precedes Black hair in contemporary discourse about Black beauty instinctively conveys that there might exist unnatural Black hair. Adichie goes on to speak of the white universal standard of beauty. For her, being raised in Nigeria under the huge influence of Christianity and white supremacy required her to straighten her afro hair because straight hair was considered the standard of beauty, professionalism, and desirability. Relocating to the US would have her begin to question these engrained norms and she would get to the point where she began to embrace and love her natural hair. Loving and caring for her natural hair did not come so easy because of colonial-ingrained stigmatization. For Black women, hair exists at the intersection of personal and political and Adichie believes that there is the impetus for a "larger political statement about the need for Black women to have different kinds of beauty" (2014, 3). The destigmatization and desirableness of Black hair is one of such ideological struggles echoed in the novel through discourse and characterization.

Sefi Atta and Chika Unigwe have both been described as transnational writers because of the abundance of geographical locations and cultures in which their lives traverse and the corpus of their fictions. Both born and raised in Nigeria, Sefi Atta moved to the United Kingdom for education purposes and currently resides in the United States, while Chika Unigwe migrated to Belgium where she lived for an extended number of years before immigrating to the United States. Their novels *A Bit of Difference* and *On Black Sisters' Street* explore a plethora of socio-political issues, amongst which subjection, power dynamics, agential capacities, and resistance of African women to the bitter legacies of colonization, white supremacy and patriarchy are dominant tropes. Although Sefi Atta establishes a bit more distance from her writings in a bid to absolve herself of the societal transformational responsibility within Western narratives most often imposed on African writers, she nonetheless acknowledges that her writing and becoming is greatly influenced by her lived reality as a Black woman. With previously colonized countries confronted with the re-

pression of their culture, language and identity vis-a-vis colonial encounters, writers of African descents have been burdened with the responsibility of amplifying narratives preoccupied with the grievous legacies of colonization and ruptured lives left in its devastating wake.

Aside from using *A Bit of Difference* as a fictional lens to dramatize the conflict between "Nigerian cultures and Western cultures of the traditional and modern variety" in the complex formation of contemporary Nigerian identities (Atta 2012, 112), Atta also attempts to find her own unique writing style that does not adhere to the Standard English ideology. Saturating her writing with indigenous African languages and Nigerian English and refusing to prioritize and "accommodate people who do not understand Nigerian cultures", is her way of resisting normalized centers compelled by white dominant culture (107). Even in her consciousness of a global audience, Atta recognizes that colonial subjects' lives positioned outside of discourse and language is one of the ways this is done. Reinserting the colonial subjects' subaltern identity back into discourse and using African languages, terms, expressions, and cultural markers to write against othering processes in a way that provides pleasure to the Nigerian audience and perhaps, inevitably, alienate dominant groups' possession of discourse, becomes a writerly responsibility she is happy to bear. Like Adichie, Atta also describes her novel as "representative of reality"—of depicting a wide range of women characters beyond the textual-accessible stereotype of the Nigerian women (2013, 3).

For Chika Unigwe, her representation of sex trafficking of African women and transnational migration in *On Black Sisters' Street* is approached slightly different. With an awareness of her African middle-class privilege alongside Western representation of sex trafficked immigrants, Unigwe offers a nuanced fictional glimpse into the circumstances of four African women trafficked into Belgium for sex work in parallel with their agential capacities within the convergent systems of patriarchy and white supremacy. Unigwe recounts in her interviews that since the publishing of *On Black Sisters' Street*, she has been designated an expert or authentic voice on sex trafficking and transnational migration and invited even by the police department to share her knowledge on a lived reality that does not belong to her (2020, 412). This she says demonstrates "just how interconnected fiction is with life", and the power dynamics inscribed into discursive spaces and writerly responsibilities associated with storytelling that cannot be abdicated even in fiction writing (412). Despite her class privilege, writing *On Black Sisters' Street* was conceived from her entry into a discur-

sive space where her skin color dictated the kind of assimilation reserved for her kind.

> When I did, I realized that I wasn't writing the sort of thing that I was back in Nigeria. I was writing something completely different. I started writing about migrant women, very melancholic women who do not have the tools to settle in this new space, or who are unable to go back, which was the position that I was in for a while. I couldn't fit in here (i.e., in Belgium), but I couldn't go back. I didn't have the courage to say that the whole thing had failed (2015, 28).

Writing, however, also meant taking cognizance of the power dynamics in Western narratives of African immigrant women and capturing the complexity of these African immigrant women's lived reality and their agential capacities without pandering to or being constrained by the Western cliches of helpless African women: "I am very interested in writing women with agency, especially in situations where, in the dominant narrative, their agency is erased" (2020, 416).

In *We Need New Names* by Zimbabwean author No Violet Bulawayo, we also find strong social and ideological struggles that cannot be separated from the social context. When questioned about the thematic resonance in her text, Bulawayo, who was born and raised in Zimbabwe and moved to the United States for college education, as well credits her occupancy and negotiation of these spaces as an African woman.

> I think when I write, subconsciously, I find myself writing about women's stories, women at the margins. It's one of those things that you don't set out to do, but it just happens. I think that speaks to where I'm coming from and where women are – you know the position of women and the kinds of lives that they are living, you know being a woman myself, and that shared compassion and the awareness and the importance of their story being told. For me it's a natural instinct (Bulawayo n.d.).

Bulawayo admits that the novel *We Need New Names* reflects the kind of space she comes from. For this reason, her text is interwoven with activism and cannot be isolated and analyzed simply as literary texts. Her novel in this sense would be regarded as Black feminist thought because not only does it engage with the struggles and experiences of Black women, it also places emphasis on the simultaneity of thought and activism. Writing about women for her comes

from a place of seeking to articulate the subjugation and oppression of Black women within white supremacist and patriarchal culture, as well as interrogate the power dynamics engrained in these spaces: "The condition of women naturally becomes one of pressure. If I'm able to do it without even thinking, then it means that, without it even being considered an issue, women from where I come from inhabit those problematic spaces. It's sad in a way, you know. I would rather be writing about women living better lives, but no, I seem to be detained" (n.d.).

It is important to clarify that I do not read these novels as autobiographies, but as fictions imbued with socio-cultural consciousness that reverberate through them in ways that furnish them with meanings. Black women's literary works are distinctive in the sense that they are concerned with the historical to contemporary multilayered marginalizations of Black women. I approach the reading of the novels through a Black feminist lens, empowered with Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist thought that the criteria to delimiting Black feminist framework from other social critical theories must in itself undergo progressive deconstructions in order to avoid recycling old forms of subjugation and producing new forms. On this basis, my advancement of a Black feminist approach to reading these novels written by African female writers in the diaspora requires a theoretical consideration that can account for the discursive possibilities present in them. Analytical reading becomes an activity that is informed with the critical assessments of hegemonic discursive structures. It is within this collocation that I develop this dialogical approach of reading that includes the authors' interviews as paratextual messages in order to furnish the texts with interdependent meanings and capture the sociocultural consciousness that might possibly become unidentifiable in a poststructuralist or postmodernist literary approach.

Accordingly, I analyze six (6) novels across four (4) genres that narrate the interlocking dimensions of the subjection of Black girls and women across historical periods, geo-political centers, and social divisions. *The Book of Not* (2003), a bildungsroman, explores the gendered component of colonial racism that impacts a young African girl. Set in colonial Rhodesia, amidst the struggle for independence from colonial domination and narrated from a first-person perspective, the plot continues the story of Tambudzai, who by a twist of casualty is able to achieve her ultimate dream of being enrolled at a Catholic boarding school. Young Ladies's College of the Sacred Heart is a prestigious predominantly white only school and Tambu's admission as well as that of the other five Black-African girls she must share a dormitory room with, is an outcome

of an ironical five percent quota granted to Black girls in colonial Rhodesia. However, worthy of note is that this pendulum of opportunity only shifts to Tambu because her brother who is the family's select to be educated in the colonial way, dies after a brief illness. Tambu and the five other Zimbabwean-Black girls confront stark racial-gendered discrimination, injustice and segregation, which greatly affects and perverts their subjectivities. The colonial school rules such as segregated housing, curriculums on religious hierarchy, staff hierarchy with African women as cooks and white women as teachers, reinforce their primitiveness, and no matter how hard they work to gain recognition for their individual achievements, their skin color gets in the way of their recognition.

Tambu loses the award of the best O'Level student to Tracey, a white female student even though she has better grades than her. This blatant discrimination and denial of an award she worked hard to get, leads to depression and dissociation. The discriminatory practices in the school, alongside the independence struggle outside the school, and white supremacist narratives that position the freedom fighters as terrorists and the white Rhodesians as victims, fracture whatever superficial cordiality exists among the girls. Her sister loses her leg in the independence struggle, and her uncle is struck with a stray bullet during the independence celebrations. The emergence of a new independent Zimbabwe, however, does not cause any positive transformation for the protagonist, and every expectation that she hoped would follow her country's independence from colonial oppression crumbles. Tambu continues to suffer invisibility, hyper-visibility, and non-recognition on both interpersonal and systemic levels in the outside world. After graduating from the university, she lands a job as a scriptwriter with an Advertising Agency, where she is denied recognition for her excellent copywriting contribution. Instead, a white male colleague is selected by the management to present her work to the clients. At the hostel, where she resides with a group of young working-class women, she suffers another major non-recognition. The white matron is unable to distinguish her from another Black occupant called Isabel, even though there are only a handful of young Black women. Tambu's angry outburst to the matron that she be called by her own name and not Isabel is met with disapproval, and she is asked to seek accommodation elsewhere. She realizes that even though independence has been won, the system is not any different and colonialism with all its attendant inequalities continues to thrive. Left with no imagination of an egalitarian future, she finally crumbles under the weight of her severe trauma and resigns from her job. Through the relationships among white and Black characters, with Zimbabwe's struggle against colonialism as the background,

Dangarembga is able to spotlight the everyday forms of intersectional injustice Black girls and women are confronted with and their abject social standings locally and globally.

The second novel, *Homegoing* (2016), is the debut novel of Ghanaian American author Yaa Gyasi, who was born in Ghana and migrated with her parents to the US as a baby. Through an African female descendancy, the historical fiction archives the legacies and memories of colonial violence together with the culpability of West African tribal groups in their own enslavement. While so many fictional and non-fictional male-centered stories of slave trade and colonial violence abound, the narration of the horrific disruption caused to eight generations and pulled together through the descendancy of an African woman is the novel's ambitious strength. Although the plot is about the grievous ruptures caused by slavery, Gyasi instantly makes the gendered component powerful and impossible to miss. Narrated in the third person narrative technique, the story follows the parallel lives of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, born into different villages (Fante and Asante) in the eighteenth century. Their lives follow a parallel path as a result of events engineered by patriarchal structures of slave trade and inter-tribal war. One half (Effia) is married off to an English governor of the cape castle and the other half (Esi) is captured in an inter-tribal raid, imprisoned in the dungeon of the cape castle, and finally shipped away to America as a slave. The story of lineages impacted by the system of imperial white supremacist heteropatriarchy however does not begin here. The half-sisters' respective births by their mother, Maame, is also orchestrated by inter-community and intra-community institutions and socio-cultures over which she has little to no control. First, she lives as a slave in the Fante community and gives birth to the first half sister, Effi. She makes her escape and flees to the Asante kingdom, where she marries a prominent war lord and gives birth to Esi.

In Fanteland, after Effia is married off, she quickly discovers that there are African women imprisoned in the dungeon of the castle being traded as slaves. She also learns that James Collins has a wife in England, and she, like the other African wives of the British soldiers, cannot claim legitimate partnership status. Though horrified by this information, she accepts her lucky fate to be married as a mistress instead of being locked in the dungeon to suffer the concurrent hardships of Western imperialism. At the same time that Effia adjusts into her role as the mistress of the castle, Esi, captured in an intertribal raid, is imprisoned in the dungeon of the castle, awaiting her turn to be shipped to America. In the dungeon, she is beaten, raped, and finally shipped to the Amer-

icas where her life gives rise to generations of Black descendants, who continue to be haunted by the afterlife of slavery. Each chapter of the novel is dedicated to the story of the descendants of each sister in Africa and America simultaneously, and how their lives, all linked together, are irrevocably changed by the history of colonial activities in Africa. Gyasi proves ambitious by narrating a historical link between the struggles of Black people on the global stage, a struggle that dates back to white supremacist colonial activities that captures some Africans to America and colonizes the rest on the continent. To end the story, Gyasi evokes this historical link by bringing Majorie, the descendant of Effia, to coincidentally meet with Marcus, the descendant of Esi. They form a lasting bond and return to Ghana to visit the Cape Coast dungeon, to witness the point where their genealogical tree was irrevocably split.

My third novel, *On Black Sisters' Street* (2011), a work of realistic fiction, was originally published in Dutch in 2008. It follows the lives of four African women who each migrate separately from the African continent to Antwerp, Belgium, to engage in sex work. Recruited by Dele, a pimp in Lagos, and made to live together in an apartment on Zwartezusterstraat, they first choose to keep their conversation to the bare minimum. After a murder mysteriously claims the life of one of them, they come to a unanimous decision that in order to mitigate the everyday racial-gendered barriers that have affect their lives, they must come to trust one another, and must prioritize their safety over their secrets and internalized shame. They open up to one another and share their subjective painful experiences leading up to their current lives in Belgium. We come to learn that while three of the women consented to be trafficked, one of them was tricked with the assurance that she was travelling to work as a nanny. The affect that binds all of them together however is their aspiration for a better life.

My fourth novel, *Americanah* (2013), also a work of realistic fiction, narrates the story of a young Nigerian protagonist, who due to the incessant university strikes in Nigeria decides to migrate to the Unites States to complete her university degree. In the US, Ifemelu confronts new racial-gendered challenges that alters the course of her life. After unsuccessfully searching for student jobs to support herself, she meets with a prospective male employer whose job offer is of a sexual nature. Her acceptance of the man's terms and conditions brings about self-loathing, which subsequently leads to depression. Through the help of a friend, she finally gets a job as a babysitter to a wealthy white American family, where she experiences racism and sexism. These experiences and many more lead to her creating a blog and devoting her full time to blogging on race

and race constructs in the US. Her blog becomes popular, and she begins to get paid invitations to speak at events and conferences. The feeling of growing dissatisfaction soon inundates her accomplishments, and she begins to long for home. On one afternoon after a thirteen-year-sojourn in the US, she decides to pack up and permanently return to Nigeria. *Americanah* is a brilliant story of race, identity, the risks of migration, and marginalized lives disrupted by the power hierarchy of geo-political centers.

My fifth novel, *A Bit of Difference* (2013), a work of literary realism, is a clinical prose that tells the story of a middle-aged Nigerian-born female protagonist, who moves to England to complete her education and decides to settle there. The novel, narrated in a non-linear and critical manner, traverses London to Atlanta to Lagos, where the protagonist's job as an accountant of a charity organization takes her and she is able to observe the differences in race and gender discourse. Deola's first keen observation begins with her arrival to the Atlanta airport. She compares the race discourse in the Uk to the US, wondering why people are quick to point at the US as a racist country, but rarely say the same thing about the UK. When she meets with Anne, the director of the international affairs at the Atlanta office, her critical personae is once again unmasked, and we are able to contemplate the implication of being an African and woman. Anne opens up about her and her partner's desire to have a child. Deola in turn decides not to share her own desire with Anne because it might be looked upon with "anthropological curiosity: the African woman's perspective" (Atta 13). Back in London, her musing turns to her status in the office, and the fact that she must speak in an accent different from her original Nigerian accent in order to be regarded as intelligent and capable of doing her job. Her sharp wit also follows her to Lagos on a work trip she engineers to coincide with the five-year memorial of her father. In Nigeria, she deliberates on the deteriorating state of the country, as well as the bourgeoisie class to which she and her extended family belongs. Her reflections expose the eclectic conflicts bedeviling the modern Nigerian man and woman. Her elder brother Lanre cheats on his wife and refuses to take responsibility for his wrongdoing. Her younger sister's marriage is also plagued with allegations of infidelity. Her cousin, Ivie is involved with a married man to the knowledge of everyone. Her mother's younger sister Aunty Bisi practices polygamy. Her mother's group of friends are preoccupied with maintaining their social status, and they come up with various schemes, from simple to contentious, to maintain their upper-class positions in the Nigerian society. Her musings on race, the implication of her racialized-gendered identity, and the hoax of white humanitarianism come to

a climax when her white employers dismiss her seasoned recommendations of practicable charity projects. Unable to disregard the feeling that she might be a diversity hire, she comes to the resolution that returning to Nigeria might be the best choice for her. The novel's strength is the critical depth and reflexivity of the protagonist about her different selves in relation to the power dynamics present in both Nigeria and England.

My last novel, *We Need New Names* (2013), also a work of realistic fiction and bildungsroman, follows the life of a pre-teen African female protagonist and her friends, navigating a world of racial segregation, violence, hunger, police brutality, authoritarianism and white humanitarianism in her postcolonial home country, Zimbabwe, and later as a young migrant to the US, where she discovers that reality for her and other postcolonial African migrants is only but an extension of the systems of domination that operate on the continent. All of the chapters, except for three brief chapters, are narrated from the protagonist, Darling's point of view. Three brief chapters are not narrated from Darling's point of view, but by a disembodied narrator. All the same, the circumstances being narrated are indistinguishable from Darling's plight. It appears that the three brief chapters intend to convey to readers that the social issues being narrated are systemic ones, which negatively impact postcolonial subjects. Darling, the protagonist of the novel, is only ten years old, and has witnessed a variety of violence, from physical to psychological to sexual violence. Her flourishing community is forcefully removed without warning, and their houses demolished by the government. The adults are left jobless and homeless, and the children are filled with hopelessness, with all of them longing to escape their impoverished circumstances.

Halfway through the novel, Darling's wish comes to pass, and her aunt Fostalina returns to take her to America. Darling soon comes to the realization that the relief she thought migrating to the US would bring, is fictitious. Instead, her circumstance has become more complicated by race, immigration policies, non-belonging, loneliness, and characteristic migrant struggles. She discovers that her aunt Fostalina, like many immigrants, is barely surviving, and her support for her and her mother back in Zimbabwe comes from working two low-income jobs. Darling completes her high school education but is unable to proceed to the university level due to the limitations of her visa status. She also cannot travel to Zimbabwe to visit because of her immigrant status. She begins to dread picking calls from her mother and friends in Zimbabwe, especially because she knows they will not believe her even if she shares her actual

reality with them. The novel ends on a sad and fractured note, with Darling's irredeemable disconnection imprinted into the reader's mind.

3. Mobilizing History and Social Positionalities

This chapter makes a compelling and careful analysis of the literary representation of Black women's fragmented subjectivities. I analyze the complex formation of the Black female characters' identities within the backdrop of the historical to contemporary conditions that activate and facilitate these fragmentations. Because my work not only interrogates the sociopolitical context into which Black women are inserted and from which our experiences emerge, but also the psychic character of these legitimized systems of domination, I embark on an introspective journey with the Black female characters as they undergo the process of becoming subordinated by multiple power relations and how they become the effect of their constrained psyche. I argue that Black women by virtue of their history with Western domination and contemporary institutional and material effects, are deprived of "the very conditions of subjective security" accessible to members of hegemonic groups (Lloyd 2000, 216). I argue that these interlocking systems of power engenders a difference in Black women's social positioning, rendering us as subjects inscribed and fabricated by distinctive layers of power.

Applying Judith Butler's psychoanalytic insight together with Black feminist perspectives into the discourse of subjection, reiteration, and resistance allows for a particularly rich discussion on the centrality of power to Black and female subjectivities in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, where historically, violent forms of social and ideological power transpired. According to Butler, power is not only what pressures the subject from the outside, which one can vigorously oppose or be overpowered by. Power is also the terms we come to internalize, to depend upon for our own existential survival, and "what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are" (1997, 2). To summarize, subjection—a fundamental process of being subordinated by power, also galvanizes a fundamental dependency on a discourse the subject does not actively choose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains their agency, thereby enacting a psy-

chologically regulated subject into existence (2–7). The way to proceed on a discovery of the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission, Butler postulates, would require thinking of the theory of power with a theory of the psyche. Concisely, Butler argues that there is no social power without the force, twists and turns of the psychic form that provides a stronghold for the social power's potential triumphant vanquish of the subject.

The novels I analyze eloquently capture how physical and ideological conditions become essential to the material formation, subordination, continuity, and discontinuity of the female characters. By exploring the psychic character of these legitimized systems of domination on the becoming of Black women as represented in the novels, I aim to contribute to the advancement of a distinctive framework for analyzing subject-centered discourse that locates understanding of causal-effects within a multitudinous and entwined web of discursive conditions. This enables us as critics working within feminist contexts to ask to what extent is identity and perceived individuality constituted by either personal immemorial occurrence(s), or socio-historical brutalities inundated on our subjectivities. Situating the subjective in the socio-historical and establishing a connection between Black women's subject-formation and anti-Black misogynistic coercive violence would demonstrate how the psychic character of imperial white supremacist patriarchal power truncates the production of Black women as "ethical" subjects (Lloyd 2000, 217).

3.1 Who am I?: Subjectivity, (Dis)Continuity, and Subjection

This sub-chapter explores the fictional representation of the interlocking structures of power that precede Black women's subjectivity in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not,* Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing,* Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*.

In the *Book of Not*, the young African female protagonist, who is also the narrative voice consistently throughout the novel, contemplates on her diminutive status and her sense of belonging within the social order of colonial Rhodesia. The bildungsroman, in a bid to unravel the protagonist's subjectivity, relentlessly juxtaposes the personal and the political, gradually revealing colonial and anti-Black conditions that produce the subject's subordination. By unearthing the protagonist's subconscious and leaving nothing to imagination, Dangarembga is able to write a Black female protagonist that is symptomatic of larger anti-Black transnational discourse. *The Book of Not* is a

sequel to Dangarembga's debut novel titled *Nervous Condition*. In the prequel, Tambu's life and psychological condition in the village is less tortured and tragic. Even though she is denied the privilege of education granted to her brother, the price of money, impenetrable and exclusive currency placed on colonial education in a colonial gendered context is such that one cannot speak of the presence of gender inequality without the intersection of race and imperial capitalist economic system. Tambu's introspection of her marginalized status would first have readers believe that her denial is only connected to her gender, but her brother's death and the family's consensus to offer her as his replacement swiftly demonstrates that colonial education is a prestigious currency unavailable in equal measure to the lower class. According to Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's qualitative research on gender-biased trends that emerged with colonization, the reason for the persistent underrepresentation of females in the school system suggests there were other factors than indigenous male superiority, given that there was evidence of randomness to parental decisions (1997, 133).

The introduction of a priced Christian and Western educational system into an already gendered colonial space further upsets the complementary gender dynamic already existing in pre-colonial societies. So, presenting a nuanced, culturally, and African-centered epistemology would require de-centering Anglo-European feminist's articulation of a universal form of patriarchal system that define women as second-class subjects. In this narrative analysis, centering African feminist knowledge would look like simultaneously focusing on the character of subjection introduced into the colonies, alongside the African peoples' subjective responses. Tambu's extended family's decision to grant first their son, followed by their daughter, educational privilege highlights a much more complex relationship between spatiality, power, discursive conditions and the negotiations that are bound to take place therein. For Tambu's family, the reason for their decision is not farfetched. In the event of their son's unfortunate death, Tambu's Western-educational privilege would bring economic benefits and elevate their class status.

Even though spaces are generally marked by ideological practices and relationships into which subjects are inserted and required to perform, Tambu's psychological decline and struggle between subjectivity and subjection is amplified with her admission into the colonial educational system. The novel opens up with a scene in which she is summoned to a political gathering in the village to act in the capacity of a witness at her uncle and guardian,

Babamukuru's trial. The agenda of the rally, which entails violently beating her Western educated uncle for allegedly being a Rhodesian conspirator, is interrupted by another violent event. Tambu's younger sister, Netsai, who is a member of the guerrilla group, steps on a landmine and causes an explosion that dismembers one of her legs. Tambu like everyone at the rally slowly registers and recovers from the explosion, to behold the extent of the tragedy. A form of intelligible awareness of her interpellation pierces her semi-consciousness: "Something was required of me! I was her sister, her elder sister. I was, by that position required to perform the act that would protect her" (Dangarembga 3). Parallel to the mental image of her interpellation, follows an awareness of her powerlessness in the face of this violence, which causes her additional misery and frustration. When her mum drops to the ground in misery and does not get up, she again registers that an "appropriate action" is required of her by virtue of her positionality as the eldest child (4). Again, she is weakened by the operation of another, possibly new form of social power on her psyche, which tells her that she is in no capacity to express this discursive corporeality. From here on, it does not get better, and we become immersed into a traumatic story of a young African girl's insufferable struggle under the appalling conditions of colonialism, and the deliberate destruction of her African and female subjectivity by anti-Black colonial structures of power.

In Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, the interlocking structures of power plays out through the horrors of slavery and colonialism and its devastating effect on the psyche of the African female characters across generation. By using historical fiction to articulate the legacy of slavery and colonialism and narrate the lives of characters connected by descent through timeframes (pre-slavery, slavery, and post-slavery), the reader is deftly nudged to comprehend the continuities, discontinuities and transformations effected by the conditions of their subjection. In *Homegoing*, Effia, one of the two sisters at a young age is informed by her father of his "bigger plans" to marry her off to a popular warrior and next in line to the chief of their village (Gyasi 7). She is compelled and powerless under his supreme parental power, so must abide by his plan to behave appropriately until her first menstrual blood. Early on, we catch on to the subtleties of power struggle between the Native men of Fante and white men. Effia's father is quick to distinguish and attribute moral superiority to his plan for his teenage daughter. He would not allow a white man to marry his daughter because amongst many other reasons, they "trade goods with our people" (7). In this sense, both Effia and her father are subordinated by the highest form of imperial white supremacist power, which Effia's father tries unsuccessfully to

circumvent on behalf of Effia. The material and symbolic scrambling for power between two different forms of patriarchy and its effect on the most vulnerable groups is illuminated by Effia's marriage to an English slave trader and controller of the cape coast castle. From childhood, Effia is mercilessly beaten by Baaba, her father's wife and stepmother for several reasons that indicates a concern with shaping her identity into an acceptable entity. The only time she is spared from her stepmother's tongue and rage is when she "didn't speak or question, when she made herself small" (8). This demonstrates that the love and acceptance Baaba shows to her stepdaughter is hugely dependent on conformity derived from absolute submission to her parental power.

For Esi, the other sister, life veers in an entirely different direction. Born to a famous and prosperous warrior of Asanteland, she is captured in a tribal war between the Asante and Fante at fifteen years and sold to the British soldiers, completely altering her possible trajectories and privileges. She is imprisoned with other captured Native women in the castle's female dungeon, and finally shipped with thousands of others to America, where her bloodline is raised in slavery. Life in the dungeon is traumatic, and the women are put through horrific experiences like starvation, terrible food conditions, flogging, and rape sometimes leading to their deaths. By putting the women through such harrowing conditions, they are forced into compliance and transformed into slaves, with the outcome that they become the effect of their subordination. The imprisoned women collectively caution one of the girls to endure the pain of being raped in silence, thereby participating in their own subjection. Their collective "hiss" is described as one "filled with anger and fear" (49) at suffering similar fate. Their collective admonishment of silence, which could be interpreted as unsympathetic, is one that is evidenced by fear. Through rape, the soldiers are able to coerce the captured women into complying with their own subjection. For Tambu, Effia, and Esi, the damaging character of colonialism, slavery, racism, and patriarchy will set in motion a destruction of their Native subjectivity, replacing it with a subdued corporeality. The implication of being the most vulnerable groups, at the bottom of the social ladder, is being subjected to multifaceted forms of injustice within and outside their homelands. Their lives become embroiled in finding ways to survive the brutal psychological structures of colonial education, colonial gendered conditions, colonial religious doctrines, armed liberational conflict, slavery, segregation, anti-Black indigenous norms, and unfolding paradoxical versions of hetero-patriarchy.

In Chika Unigwe's and Chimamanda Adichie's realistic fictions, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Americanah, which* are narrated across the trans-geographical spaces of Nigeria and the migrant host countries, the diversity of Black female characters, submerged in their divergent experiences—sometimes shaped by their class status and sometimes not—arguably reveals the complexity of power, which relentlessly impacts their subject formations. The portrayal of these characters in their home country (Nigeria) and host societies (Belgium and US) exposes the nuances of the forces, and pressures of the fundamental character of the systems that they persistently navigate as part of their embodied reality. Would this repetitive negotiation lead to a permanent entrapment, loss of individuality or create an outlet for resistance and performance of subverted subjectivities? As is typical of the realistic fiction genre, both novels utilize diverse narrative techniques and evocative character portrayals to fictionalize the struggles of the characters within complex and intersectional power structures. Ifeyinwa Genevieve Okolo notes about *On Black Sisters' Street* that the combination of narrative structures of fragmentation, plurality of protagonists, external and character-bound narrative situation used by Unigwe foreshadows a story of "experiential complexity that eludes easy categorization" (2019, 5). I argue that this combination of narrative structures embodies the essence of subject-centered narratives, positioning individuals within the context of their material lives to promote self-reflexivity. It highlights the necessity of avoiding the reduction of historically oppressed groups to mere objects of analysis, regardless of the material conditions of power—such as patriarchy, sexual violence, poverty, the carcerality of undocumented migration, and femicide—that these groups must navigate for survival. In light of this, I argue that Adichie and Unigwe's abilities to create space for a largely ostracized and exploited group to reflect on their subjectivities within the external narrative sweep allows for an empathetic reading of the novel. *Americanah* allows us into the personal and emotional lives of Black and migrant women and *On Black Sisters' Street* is a fictional contribution to a controversial topic that refuses to overwhelm readers with the morality of sex work. The novels are timely reminder to us to discuss systemic issues not just as theories, but also as material conditions impacting actual people.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu, from a middle-class educated Nigerian family is raised within postcolonial discursive conditions. Her migration to the United States activates a drastic change in her consciousness. Ifemelu on her arrival, with the contract of a partial scholarship and restrictive student visa, would ponderously come to the realization that there are multiple arrangements

of power that she must negotiate, the result of which looks like developing a racialized-gendered consciousness that was lacking in her pre-migratory reality. She must learn to adjust to the racial identity imposed on her from the outside and balance her previous pre-migration non-racial subjectivity with the newly assigned US racial identification. Affirming that African immigrants have their varieties of cultural heritages and identities that establish and empower their subjectivities, Ava Landry argues that they, on their arrival to the United States, must however "deal with Blackness as a master status, or as their most salient social identity, in ways that are new, complex, and foreign" (2018, 127). Due to her student visa restrictions, she is provided with alternative social security documents by Aunt Uju to enable her work. When she complains of the lack of resemblance between her and the picture on the work document, Aunt Uju regales her with stories of immigrants who work with sketchy alternative documents undiscovered because white people, who are mostly on top of the hierarchy, are unable to distinguish between Black people.

Similar to Ifemelu's erasure of her previous identities, the enslaved African women in *Homegoing* are transformed into slaves with no significant heritage and distinctions. Prior to their capture, the women do not share similar subjectivity and heritage. Afua, one of the enslaved women, is voluntarily sold by her village chief because she gets pregnant before her "marriage ceremony" (Gyasi 29). Tansi, another woman was captured while her husband was "off fighting a war" (30). Esi comes from affluence and is referred to as "ripe mango" (31) as an affirmation of her indulgent upbringing. These women are "stacked into the women's dungeon that they all had to lie, stomach down, so that women could be stacked on top of them" (30). Their Black femaleness becomes their master status, and their men in collaboration with European slave traders exploit them in these parallels. On their arrival to the Americas, the enslaved women are subjected to disciplinary measures and signifying practices intended to erase their individuality and systematize their identity as an enslaved unit. They are forbidden from speaking their indigenous languages and women who try to impart their culture into their offsprings are punished. Esi is beaten for naming her daughter "Maame" after her own mother and for "every twi word" (71) her renamed daughter, Ness utters. Ness witnessing the violence inflicted on her mother becomes "too scared to speak", yet again, her mother is whipped "for each minute" of her silence (71). When Ness is sold at a very young age to another slave owner, she is used as a sexual object to break a new belligerent male slave. She is mercilessly flogged into unconsciousness for every of his rebel-

lious action until he is finally broken by his compassion and maturing love for her. Their love marriage is finally consummated in their scars and pool of blood in submission to racialized coercive authority. Their union, described as 'unholy holy union', epitomizes the violent, brutal and murderous imperial white supremacist capitalist patriarchal ecosystem that brought into existence their love and compassion for each other.

A description of an auction scene in *On Black Sisters' Street* also dramatizes this physical and psychological interplay of obliteration commanded on Black women:

> The women would be called into the room one at a time for the buyers to see and admire. They would all have numbers, for names were not important. Their names would be chosen by whoever bought them. Names that would be easy for white clients to pronounce. Easy enough to slide off their tongues. Nothing longer than two syllables and nothing with the odd combinations of consonants that make African names difficult for fragile tongues. 'Number three, ladies and gentlemen. Number three is the type of woman white men like. Thin lips. Pointed nose. Sweet ikebe (Unigwe 278–279).

The manner in which the African female migrant sex workers in *On Black Sisters' Street* are paraded and identified by numbers instead of their names demonstrates a lack of recognition for their humanity and previous subjectivities. This recalls African female characters being treated as an enslaved unit in *Homegoing*. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's job search in the US further exposes her to biases and tensions that she slowly deconstructs for comprehension. She is subjected to anti-Black, anti-African and anti-Nigerian bigotry that leaves her helpless and vulnerable. In the absence of a job offer, and with her tuition fees and bills accumulating, she becomes desperate for any job. She finally defeatedly, accepts a job offer of a vague sexual nature from a man. The man is unclear about the job conditions but makes it clear that he would pay "a hundred dollars a day" as compensation for some sort of relief that would be provided by her (Adichie 177). After the first sexual activity, her condemnation of herself leads her into a depressive state. She blames herself for succumbing to the man's offer, even though she is perceptive of the man's assuredness of his economic power over her.

Similarly, in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, the oscillation between the young women's pre-migratory and present lives, the struggle between subjection & subjectivity, and continuity & discontinuity is illustrated in the young

women's quest for the restoration of their pre-migratory sex work identities. Even though they all except for Joyce deliberately choose to enter into sex work, firmly ensconcing them within the modern feminist empowering discourse, and forestalling the possibility of categorizing them as victims, their quest for some kind of restoration, amidst their narrated experiences, demands a nuanced inquiry into the structures of hegemony that enact their becoming sex-workers. While it is incontrovertible that their desire to liberate themselves from their dire economic conditions is the main reason for their foray into sex-work, this decision however was not an easy one to make. In fact, they all express resistance in different ways to their recruitments. Right before their travel to Belgium, their subjectivities are altered to induce their subjection to new forms of power for their potential white male clients' benefits. In contrast to Ifemelu in *Americanah*, the young women are prepared for the racialized-gendered identities they must take on to survive in their white hegemonic host country. Their empowering sex productivity paired with anti-Blackness is filtered through a lens of silence and obedience that is to their disadvantage. The only expression they must convey is one that portrays them as pliant African sex-workers, willing to allow white men relieve their racist fetishes on their Black female bodies.

To become sex-workers of African descent, they must first rid themselves of their attachment to their earlier dignified identities, and de-humanize themselves through telling false stories about the conditions of their migration at the foreign office. They relinquish their passports to Madam until their debts are fully paid, rendering them as unknown. However, they still need to fulfil the requirement of registration in Antwerp. Coached by Madam prior to her visit to the foreign office, Sisi tells a falsified story of how her entire family in Liberia is murdered in inter-tribal conflicts fuelled by colonial upheaval. According to Madam, the more tragic the story, the better her chances because white people are consumed by Black misery: "They love to hear about us killing each other, about us hacking each other's heads off in senseless ethnic conflicts. The more macabre the story the better" (Unigwe 121). By enmeshing them into the contradictions of anti-Blackness and sex-work, mandating them to "approximate an ideal, a norm of behaviour, a model of obedience" commiserate to their racialized-gendered interpellation, they unwittingly contribute to and further their own subjection, enjoying intelligibility only to the extent of their construction within imperial white supremacist system (Butler 1997, 85). The young women's performances substantiate Butler's theorization of subjection as a vicious circle of becoming subordinated by power, and becoming dependent for survival

and continuity on the very power that produces subordination (2–12). In this sense, the desire for survival necessitates that the women reiterate the discursive conditions that precede their materiality, thereby realizing their agency through reproducing the conditions of their subaltern existence.

In all of the novels, the psychic character of these legitimized systems of domination on these young women's subjectivities is dramatized through several actions that produce and reiterate their subjections. Tambu in *The Book of Not* and Ifemelu in *Americanah* hunger to embody non-African behaviors, languages, accents, and way of doing things that give an appearance of assimilation to superior white ontology. Ifemelu, plunged into the racial arrangement of the United States intuits that she must learn how to navigate the white social world that reads and validates her foreign Blackness as the semi-acceptable kind of Black in contrast to African Americans. She refuses to accept the backhanded compliment from the sister of her white employer that implies that African migrant women are not problematic in the way African American women are. She sees the compliment for what it is – a white supremacist, divisive and simplistic perspective on racial-gendered discourse. She understands that her foreignness is simply an expansion in the discourse of the material implications of anti-Blackness in the US context. Her pre-migratory ethnic identity is simply another layer to her identity in the US that does not protect her from misogynoir because her Blackness still automatically inscribes her as a diminutive other. She understands that misogynoir is the problem, not African American women's behaviors. A manual worker's display of hostility towards her personifies this polemic. Opening the door of the house where she works part-time as a babysitter to invite him in, his incorrect assumption of her as the owner of the house prompts a shocked and hostile reaction. Comprehending her position as the house-help instantly transforms his attitude: "his face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be" (Adichie 205). Later, in one of her blogposts, Ifemelu narrates the incident with the title "Sometimes in America, Race is Class": "It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned, I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, 'Blacks' as a whole are often lumped with 'Poor Whites.' Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed" (205).

In Tambu's school in *The Book of Not*, there are unspoken codes of conduct observed by the Black female students, for the reason that they are Black. It is considered an inappropriate behavior to allow their skin to come in contact

with a white person, student, and teacher alike. Tambu is appalled at herself for carelessly allowing her skin to come in contact with that of her white teacher's. This error also causes angst for her fellow Black classmate, Ntombizethu, who is narrated as reacting to this careless behavior by widening her eyes in apprehension (Dangarembga 31). Similar precaution is also taken on the assembly line. The Black students are hypercautious and agitated about overstepping their racial boundaries in their determination of where to stand on the queue.

> Monstrous caution was required before you joined the form. If you mistakenly placed yourself behind the wrong person, you could end up suffering quite savagely. The person who joined the line after you did not present such a problem, as she could determine for herself which classmate happened to be ahead, and could make her own decisions concerning the desirability of that girl's proximity. But if she was ahead of you, a white girl could pitch peremptorily further forward, when you stood too close, prompting the classmate before her to do the same, and the next one too, until you were a lonely figure afloat on a sea of scorn as matter of fact as the clouds above us. And even if she remained stationary, there was agony in not knowing whether she would move from your presence or not, whether you had judged the distance correctly or not, for there was an imperative, broken by Sister Catherine only to reinforce it in all of us: your skin and theirs should not come in contact (51).

The dining room conventions and sleeping arrangements also contribute to placing the African girls in a heightened humiliating and Othered state. Bougainvillea, Tambu's non-African classmate, Others their bodies with her gaze:

> "See what I mean,' she turned to Tracey, 'They've both got such fine hands. Look at those amazing fingers!'[…]. 'It's not just those two! Have you noticed? It's all of them!' […]. 'Let's have a look! She raised an eyebrow with a practiced investigators motion as she inclined her head forward […]. 'Just look at the shape of that nail and that crescent, it's a perfect half moon! Isn't it wonderful!" (37).

The non-African food options and preferences at the dining hall table leaves an indelible inferior marking on the Black girls who can neither afford the sophisticated foreign "pleasures" nor be allowed to bring their own local delicacies because they are not considered decent (40). Also, the six Black female students

are allocated to a single dormitory with its own separate bathroom and toilet, away from other dormitories. Anastasia, the most senior student who "technically should have had a room all to herself with a washbasin up on St Sophie's corridor" is also denied her senior privilege by virtue of her Blackness (53). They are subjected to public humiliation for allegedly clogging the college's sewage system with the disposal of their "used feminine hygiene pads into their toilet" (63). The headmistress not only publicly chastises them but also humiliates them through her portrayal of them as unpolished and ignorant. It is unclear if the Black female students are truly the perpetrators, or if the accusation is founded on prejudicial sentiments. However, what is clear is that the Black students' bathroom is not furnished with incinerators like those of their white peers. The implication is that they can only dispose of their pads in the incinerator of their classroom bathrooms, which the "regulations" allow them to visit (67). Tambu continues to court the approval of her white teachers and classmates, and dissociates from her mum, family, and local community who she considers local, low achieving people. She appraises her future as more advantaged on the condition that she forms allyship with her European fraction and delights in the humiliating exactingness of colonial education.

After suffering the prejudice of her college administrator, who assumed she could not be articulate because of her foreign accent, Ifemelu in *Americanah* shrinks "like a dead leaf" and begins to practice an American accent and way of being (Adichie 164). Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street* deliberately changes her birth name from Chisom to expunge her previous subjectivity for her new one and Alek, her co-sex worker is renamed Joyce by the pimp to convey feminine attractiveness and compliance. In *Homegoing*, the African wives of the British soldiers are called "wenches" as substitute for wives. They are regarded as inferior so therefore cannot be called wives because it is "a word reserved for the white women across the Atlantic" (Gyasi 19). They are also given new English names by their husbands for ease of pronunciation and banned from practicing their indigenous African spirituality. With the dungeon beneath them serving as a reminder of how easily their fate could be reversed, the African wives perform their wifely duty in complete submission, realizing their agency by differentiating themselves from their kinfolks in the dungeon: "There are women down there who look like us, and our husbands must learn to tell the difference" (25). Equipped with the awareness that her fate is dependent on white approval of her personhood, Tambu in *The Book of Not* concludes on her course of action. Being an average student could not suffice for her ambition and overall survival. She needed to be twice as good to get half as far or even a half of what

her white classmates have: "Average simply did not apply; I had to be abso-lutely outstanding or nothing" (Dangarembga 25). We do not have to wonder for very long why Tambu is plagued by this intense need for recognition. It is revealed in subsequent pages that her acceptance into the college was based on a five-percentage quota apportioned by the Rhodesian government for dif-ference and diversity. Similar to Ifemelu's precarious situation in the US that leaves her vulnerable, this white supremacist benefaction modifies Tambu and the other selected African girls' psyche, placing them in a liminal state of com-pliance. The macro and microaggressions she is confronted with daily and her introspection on how to manage her internal feelings and external reactions, together with the pressure to outperform her white classmates, induces in her a hypercritical subjectivity. She enlists as a volunteer to engage in appreciatory tasks for the Rhodesian army. Knitting for the Rhodesian side is her way to pay restitution for her sister's involvement with the freedom fighters, labelled ter-rorists. Despite her contribution, the governmental segregation rule forbids her from driving with her white classmates to attend supplementary science lessons at the government secondary school for her A level examination. De-spite her assiduous study habits and having the overall best A-Level result, her trophy is unjustly given to the second best, a white girl.

These incidents lead to a complete fragmentation of her internal psychic space and corporeality. Yet, her psyche is impaired beyond redemption, for she continues to absolve the system of any wrongdoing: "For surely Sacred Heart cannot be wrong" (Dangarembga 163). To reside the blame where it rightfully belongs with the system of white supremacy requires a different subjectivity, one she clearly lacks. Tambu's subjectivity suffers a complete rupture due to this non-recognition, trapping her in an "inescapable and psychically trau-matic framework with no exit" (Saint 2020, 2). The effects of these injustices become manifested in the slouching of her body and reluctance to resume her studies. Yet, she lacks the anti-racist depth to fathom what the problem could be, describing the reasons for her lack of enthusiasm as "incomprehensible" (Dangarembga 99). She stops knitting and resigns to an unproductive self. Her withdrawal could be interpreted as a form of quiet protest against the school's betrayal, but going by her continuous absolution of the school, she could also simply be suffering from lethargy induced by the lack of recognition for her hard work. She continues to linger in a liminal space of nothingness, maintaining her distance from her African classmates. She hangs for a mo-ment in this liminal space, and a little light of comprehension appears to intercept her subjection. She recognizes that the deficit should not have from

the very beginning been located in herself or fellow Black classmates, but in "the Europeans" trying to alter their pre-reflexive layer by alternating their African identities between invisibility – a nanny, a cook, a boy gardener, boy messenger, boy driver, a member of the African dormitory and hyper-visibility – terrorist or kaffir (110). Yet, this light of comprehension fizzles out as she returns to her subordinated condition by recollecting the headmistress's colonial benefaction: "No, there was nothing ungodly in the nuns' behavior when they had given so many of us scholarships!" (102).

For Ama, Efe and Joyce in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi's murder communicates to them that compartmentalizing their subjectivities, and revealing nothing of their previous lives is to their disadvantages. By sharing their stories with one another, they memorialize their pre-migratory identities. In this way, they circumvent dying nameless like Sisi. Even though aware of their powerlessness, this sharing gives space for them to re-trace their subjectivities—to reclaim their past, to tell and remind themselves of who they once were, who they plan to return to after their debt repayment. If not for this reason alone, the reader discovers that they all come from different walks of life, with divergent experiences, arguably disrupting fixed, homogeneous, and simplistic Western categorizations of African migrant sex workers as innocent, helpless, vulnerable, and trafficked victims. Through series of flashbacks, Efe, Ama and Joyce alternate in telling their stories. Efe and Joyce reveal their childhood dreams of wanting to be writers and doctors respectively. Joyce further reveals that her real name is Alek, and she is of Sudanese nationality. Stripped of everything including her family in a tribal conflict, she falls in love with a Nigerian soldier stationed at her refugee camp and travels to Lagos with him. However, starting a family with him proves difficult because of his mother's xenophobic views. It is also revealed that Sisi is a university graduate escaping from economic austerity, and Ama born to a middle-class Christian family, and sexually abused by her stepfather, detachedly approaches sex work as a means to escape from her predictable restaurant job and the trauma of being raped from a young age. Besides Joyce who was not told the nature of the job, the others were fully aware of the kind of job they were coming to do in Antwerp. Fleshing out their stories bestows dignity on their otherwise dehumanized bodies and relocates power back in them to tell their stories by themselves. Finally, imbuing the characters with intersectional trajectories allows for new forms of interwoven, indeterminate subjectivities from a non-white and non-Western perspective. This complexity of experiences and positionalities conveyed by the author necessitates an inquiry into the

mechanisms of the production of sex mobility within the transnational sex industry, which will be further discussed in chapter five.

In *Homegoing*, even though there is a general narrative of struggle between the Black female characters' subjectivity and subjection, and sometimes an inducement of subjection through subjectivity, a few of the characters resist the reiteration of their colonial subjected status. Akosua, a young Asante girl, spurns the white supremacist rationalization and normalization of tribal conflicts for the economy of slavery. She rejects the marriage proposal of James, the grandson of Effia and Governor James Collins, for the sole reason that he is from a slaver family. His attempt to justify the capitalistic needs that exacerbate the inter-tribal wars is met with her taciturnity and declaration that she will henceforth be a law unto herself: "I am proud to be Asante, as I am sure you are proud to be Fante, but after I lost my brothers, I decided that as for me, Akosua, I will be my own nation" (Gyasi 99). Recognizing the racial-gendered impact of the conflict, she opts for swearing her allegiance to herself in contrast to Tambu who measures her full humanity via assimilation to white supremacist norms and recognition by colonial authorities. For Akosua, one of the symbolic elements of belonging to her own nation is both refusing to be treated as a property of her parents as is the norm, and rejecting the racial, capitalistic, and patriarchal expectation that she should be excited to be wooed by a prominent "slaver" family (98). She later defies her parents to marry James who also disavows himself from his noble ancestry and responsibility. Her decision does not come without consequence, as she is barred from returning to her hometown. Akosua's defiance of both colonial and patriarchal subordination births and iterates a new subjecthood, previously assigned only to sons and men. David Lloyd explains this new subjecthood in his article on colonial trauma, as the conditions of a subdued but not subjected transformed subjectivity (2000, 219–227). This transformed subjectivity is reiterated in her daughter Abena's embodiment of her femaleness, free to an extent from the colonial gendered constraint under which every Fante and Asante woman had to operate. Nevertheless, the coercive process of colonial and patriarchal subjection truncates Abena's subjectivity. She becomes ashamed of her un-married status and begs her childhood friend to free her from her acquired shame by making her his second wife. Her dependence on the very power that produces her subordination for the purpose of intelligibility re-enacts her subordination. Thus, despite Gyasi's depiction of subversive Black female characters, whatever imaginable utopian conclusion the reader is wont to reach about these characters' fate is truncated, as these female characters

encounter various forms of public punishment and personal disappointment for their forms of resistance. Akosua and her husband are haunted by bad luck and turns in bad harvests annually, thus acquiring the name Unlucky. Abena's sexual freedom is linked to the village's series of annual bad harvests. She is threatened with expulsion from the village if she either gets pregnant or the bad harvest lasts into seven years, and even when they catch a break before the end of seven years, her sexual partner who promised her marriage refuses to fulfil his vow. She eventually dies by drowning during a forceful baptism by a white missionary, because she refused to renounce her indigenous beliefs or submit to the authority of the British government and foreign religion.

Akua, her daughter raised by the missionary is plagued with fragmented subjectivities—a consequence of Eurocentric and Indigenous (in) coherence. After her mother's death, she is renamed Deborah by the missionary. She is flogged to compel her to repent of her sins and forced to repeat "God bless the Queen" with each stroke on cane that lands on her body (Gyasi 184). At sixteen, with her doubts about the Christian god left unanswered, she defiantly renounces the "strange game of student/teacher, heathen/savior" relationship with the missionary and marries a fellow Asante trader (185). While it is possible to conclude that her repudiation of her colonial education signifies a deliberate self-consciousness, in actuality, she fluctuates between fragmented subjectivities. Like other female characters before her, there is no possibility for psychic healing from these inconsistencies plaguing her. In order to find some sort of psychological relief, she prays to "every god she had ever known" (188), including the Christian God "whom the missionaries had always described in terms both angry and loving" (188). Like her mother and other female characters who have in different forms unsuccessfully rebelled against the system, the damage to herself is permanent. In her psychotic state, she sets herself and three children on fire, successfully killing two before she is rescued.

Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street* is murdered for her attempt at resistance. Her femicide is a consequence for her insubordination and communicates to the others their hopelessness and the impracticability of envisioning different lives for themselves. The three women all continue their sex works with the hope that they are able to repay their debts and rebuild their desired dreams. Nyasha, Tambu's cousin in *The Book of Not* who is described in revolutionary and noncompliant terms in the prequel loses the battle to depression and bulimia. Her experience in England is no different from Tambu's in Rhodesia. Her commiseration with Tambu's unrecognition at her school spotlights an impression of her dehumanization in England: "You'll have to deal with it. Maybe it's

not so bad. You'd have to cope with [...] well this kind of thing, sooner or later. You know that, Tambu, don't you? I always told you a lot about England" (Dangarembga 91). Diagnosed as bulimic and depressed, she is placed on medications. Her medications indirectly cause changes to her belligerent personality. In her newly medicated solemnity, she confides in Tambu her rehabilitated way to deal with the system, which is succumbing to the rule in order to protect her futuristic advantages within the system. I posit that her medications represent the imperial white supremacist system's punishment of defiant identities—a medical intervention to bend unstable, aberrant identities into conformity. Netsai, Tambu's sister likewise pays a price for her attempt at rebellion. One of her limbs is ripped off by a bomb.

For Tambu, who has throughout the novel performed her identity in repression by staying "calm and gracious no matter what happened", she is only used as a pawn of white supremacy and finally discarded (74). After gaining independence from the Rhodesians, her optimism for an improved life with fair and equal treatment is again unattainable under the continuing control of white supremacy. She suffers invisibility in the advertising agency, where she works as a copywriter, and is denied credit for her excellent contribution. Instead, her work is co-opted by her white male colleague, and he is celebrated and promoted in her place. Yet, she tries to remain cheerful and agreeable in the face of this misogynoir, rationalizing the decision of her boss as one that serves the interest of everyone. At her residential lodging, she is mixed up with another Black girl and addressed as Isabel repeatedly by the white matron of the hostel even after relentless correction. She vows to keep correcting the matron in order for her individuality to be established like the other white female residents. However, the irony is not concealed from her that her disgruntlement with being invisible and nameless is expressed in opposition to the white ladies' recognition and visibility. The implication of this is that for her as with other Black women, their relation to resistance is in no simple way a matter of contesting perceived individual disadvantages within an ethically well-regulated neo-liberal society. This violence of misidentification present in independent Zimbabwe is not a simple matter of forgetfulness on the part of the matron, but a racializing violence set in motion from colonial Rhodesia that interpret colonial subjects as "objects of a biological and cultural judgment of inferiority" (Lloyd 2000, 218). When she finally expresses her outrage at being repeatedly misidentified, she is politely asked to find accommodation elsewhere. Her self-expression once again is incorrectly interpreted as coming from a place of misery and antisocial behavior. The irony is not lost on her that

the matron still addresses her as Isabel even at the point of evicting her from the hostel. She oscillates between invisibility and hyper-visibility the entire novel and does not achieve her pursuit for recognition.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu is engulfed with imposter syndrome and her professional diversity talks, an offshoot of her successful race and gender blog, is toned-down to appease her white patrons. Her realization that they "merely wanted the gesture of her presence" and not "the content of her ideas" after her first unsuccessful talk culminates in the makeover of her experiential insights (Adichie 377). However, prior to this plot development, she makes the decision to take back a tiny piece of her subjectivity by reviving her Nigerian accent. Her "fleeting victory" at perfectly imitating the American accent only after three years of sojourn in the US "had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (216). In *Homegoing*, Majorie, the granddaughter of Akua, first generation immigrant to the United States, and the last female descendant, suffers from an unstable sense of belonging set in motion by the historical processes of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and economic migration. Her subjectivity is jeopardized and fragmented. By locating the last descendant of Effia and Esi in a liminal space and capturing her journey to finding a balance between her pre and post migration identities, Gyasi maps out the intrinsic and intimate attachment between African and African American identities and evolving Black identities. That slavery was legally abolished and previously colonized countries gained their independence does not mean things returns to the way they were before colonial disruption. Transformations (forced and voluntary) in the physical and psychological manifestations of enslaved and colonized Black people's identity had already occurred, causing a change to how the present and future is navigated. For the matriarchs, Effia and Esi, the fundamental character of these historical processes triggers a discontinuity in their life as they once lived it and an alteration of their afterlives and generations to come. For survival and continuity, they have to abandon their intrinsic attachment to their previous subjectivities and forge new attitudes to manage the demands of the dehumanizing system imposed on their personal and group identities. Leading up to Marjorie, the last female descendant, their dispossession of subjectivity and subsequent subjection to new ways of being have a lasting impact on both their physical identity and psychic internality, creating an obstacle to their sense of wholeness.

These evidential developments reveal that even though resistance is possible, subjects of colonial coercive violence might not be able to free themselves

completely of "normalizing discourses", thus producing identities shaped by physical violence and psychological trauma (Bulter 1997, 88). Ntombi's retort to Tambu during one of their impassioned arguments, "those who want to unforbid themselves, as though they were the ones who forbade themselves in the first place!" (Dangarembga 69) encapsulates the vicious circle of coercive subjection and resistance.

3.2 Transgenerational Black Trauma: Stoicism, Dissociation, Unresolvable Contradictions, and the Legacies of Historical Transatlantic Misogynoir

Following the exploration of the impact of colonial coercive violence on Black women as represented in four texts, and the interruption caused to their becoming, this sub-chapter unpacks the resultant systemic trauma experienced by Black women as represented in six texts. In *Homegoing, The Book of Not, We Need New Names, A Bit of Difference, On Black Sisters' Street* and *Americanah*, the dramatization of cultural trauma plays a significant role in the fragmentation of Black women's subjectivity. By focusing on the affective and bodily experiences evoked in the texts, we can engage with the systemic trauma that drives the cultural transformation and fragmentation of the characters' identities. These narrative dramatizations of trauma echo the concepts of historical and multigenerational trauma, which according to The American Psychological Association (APA), is a "phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced a terrifying event show adverse emotional and behavioral reactions to the event that are similar to those of the person himself or herself" (2020). The six novels focalize a diverse range of Black female characters, each bearing the lingering effects of trauma inflicted by coercive power. These effects manifest in how they perceive themselves and interact with one another in group settings. According to Jones Brandon, members of a group who have not directly experienced historical trauma can still feel the effects of the event generations later (n.d. 16). A few of such transgenerational acculturating behaviors highlighted in the novels, include stoicism and dissociation, both of which stem from the unresolvable contradictions of the colonial gender system and misogynoir.

Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* is one important narrative that centers the traumatized conditions of African women resulting from the cumulative ordeals negatively impacting their African identities in colonial Rhodesia and

independent Zimbabwe. This traumatic condition generated from anti-Black misogyny results in Black female characters' embodiment of stoicism and dissociation as reactive tools to the complexity of their subjection. From the beginning of the novel, Tambu's interpersonal relationship with her mother is contoured by the traumatic legacies of an anti-African capitalist system. Her experience of colonial gendered racism at her colonial school negatively impacts her psyche in such a way that her certainty in the inferiority of her kind is played out on her mother. Her commitment to having a completely different life from her mother in the village implodes into a deep-seated hatred for her mother. Imagining her mother as "avaricious and hollow" elevates her own sense of self (Dangarembga 9). A form of a stoic relational attitude that can be traced to their mirrored experience of misogynoir is transmitted between mother and daughter. Their lives, individually and collectively, are impacted by a combination of anti-Black misogyny and intra-racial gender dynamic that deny them subjectivity and agency.

Tambu is enrolled in a colonial school against the wishes of her mother. Mai, her mother, is denied agency by her husband and brother-in-law on the grounds of her Black femaleness, and Tambu in her colonial for-girls-only school is Othered because of her Blackness. As African and female, they are Othered within their own communities and in the white dominant society. The constant reminder of the (un)resolvable contradictions of their status implodes into a performance of stoicism that leaves no sympathy or concern for each other's hardship. Witnessing each other as proof of their inferior status, they weaponize their subjugation against each other. Their feelings echo their disapproval of each other's identity and they are only able to communicate through spasms of anger and scorn. Mai repeatedly taunts Tambu about her affiliation with whiteness: "Do you still like *matumbu*, Tambudzai! Can you white people eat *mufushwa* with peanut butter" (7), and Tambu reciprocates by harboring a deep condemnation of her African womanhood: "No, you don't see the contradiction of being astonished at being oneself so plenipotentiary and begging God to make you not like your mother" (11). On their way to the community meeting convened by the guerilla fighters, Mai ominously admonishes Tambu on how to behave: "if you show anybody fear at all, you will be asked what you are afraid of. Then Tambudzai, I hope you are listening, it will be finished for you!" (10). Not only is Tambu dissociated from her mother, her relationship with her younger sister also suffers under the psychological violence of colonialism. Constrained by the narrative of primitiveness directly and indirectly implied in her school, she chooses to distance herself from

her sister for the purpose of hiding her sister's revolutionary activities from her white counterparts' reckoning. The devastating effects of the trauma of anti-Black misogynoir ultimately impacts their personal sense of identity and relationship with one other, causing complete dissociation and stoicism.

David Lloyd in his article on "Colonial trauma/Postcolonial recovery?" engages the various symptoms of trauma through postcolonial lens. These symptoms include and are not limited to dissociation, dislocation and amnesia or the will of the victim to forget the ordeal (2000, 214). Though Lloyd, as with a number of postcolonial thinkers, discusses trauma in reference to colonialism and imperialism, I transfer this understanding of colonial trauma to the anti-Black misogynistic experiences of Black women, with the aim of elaborating the psychological effects of trauma beyond the male-oriented discourse of colonized cultures. According to Lloyd, in contrast to Western states, the production and emergence of an "ethical subject" (i.e. one whose subject-formation is produced through its own relational consent to disciplinary institutions and who retains the agency to suspend its immediate interests in the service of a well-regulated society), is unrealized in colonial and postcolonial contexts as a result of the historical exercise of and contemporary presence of racialized coercive violence (217). Extending the definition of trauma as a "sense of utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent" to the description of the effects of colonization, Lloyd pontificates colonial traumatization as resulting from the violent condition of colonization wherein not only the technological apparatus of coercion is controlled but even the means of making sense is controlled by the colonizer (214–215). This means that the materialization and credibility of sensibility outside the dominant framework is denied the colonized culture. Additionally, this "literal numbing of sense" of the trauma victim also corresponds to the denial of the means of making sense of the traumatizing event outside the "terms that constitute the common sense of hegemony" (215).

In the transference of Lloyd's colonial trauma, I proceed with the aim of mapping the traumatized conditions and symptoms of Black women, as represented in my selected literatures, beyond the social context of blanket colonial coercive violence. For Black female characters' like Tambu, Nyasha, Mai, Maiguru, Abena, Ama, Sisi, Majorie, Ifemelu, and Aunt Uju, who are subject to both anti-Black racist misogyny and problematic intra-racial and intra-community gender dynamic, the annihilation of their subjectivity operates at multiple layers, and their trauma is also reflective of these contradictions. In *The Book of Not*, the sense of inferiority imposed on Tambu and her Black school-

mates, dramatized through various school regulations and racial etiquettes, affects their subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In their dormitory known as the African hall, they constantly find themselves involved in irreconcilable conflicts, expelling their rage on another. Constrained by the reinforcement of not only the inferiority of their culture, but also their budding African womanhood, they turn their gaze on another, apathetically pointing out their deficits. Anastasia, one of the Black seniors, expresses contempt for Irene's carefree attitude. Tambu considers herself an improved specie by virtue of her enthusiastic conformity, and desires to be separated from the other Black-African girls. One day, their delicate interpersonal relationship crumbles and Ntombi, who resents Tambu's knitting endeavor for the Rhodeisan troops, declares her a traitor. In rage, she attacks Tambu and the others have to intervene. The pain behind Ntombi's outburst is described as a deadly ache recognizable to all of them beyond the "mere smart of school-girl rivalry" (Dangarembga 138). And even in their misplaced rage towards themselves, they are nevertheless angst-ridden over the perception of their conducts by their white school mates. Holding back a stricken Ntombi, they admonish her;

> Don't let them say that's always what happens here with us in this dormitory […]. Is that what we want, he, *vasikana*? For them to say, ah, those, that's what they do, so just leave them like that! There was no need to tell us who she was talking about, who spoke like that. An ominous, undefined 'they' in the dormitory always meant Europeans (139).

Marked by the events of their Otherness and dehumanization, their bodies act as fertile sites for trauma. Tambu's state of hyper-vigilance, due to the contradiction of belonging to both Western educational elite and subordinate groups, incites physical and psychological fatigue. Ntombi goes into catatonia from the news of the brutal murders of family by the Rhodesian troops, Anastasia is plagued with insomnia right from her second form due to anxiety about the renowned racial antics of the white nuns. In the fifth form, her condition is aggravated, earning her poor grades for low productivity. The burden of inhabiting a subjugated identity becomes too heavy for Nyasa to bear. She dissociates herself from the reality of her country's subservient and disrupted state, her own inferior reality in Rhodesia and the UK and her mother's colonial gendered inferiority. Her solemn discussion with Tambu through the haze of the "major tranquillizer" administered to her by her mother epitomizes her desire for a liberated subjectivity and an independent Zimbabwe: "Imagine what it will be

like! […]. You'll be able to go into whichever toilet you like! And any school for that matter. And you won't all be packed in, crowded in a stuffy dorm! You'll be treated like everyone else" (94). Alternating between a state of bellicosity and complete dissociation, peace eludes Nyasa in totality, and only the medication administered to her helps her to claim some semblance of calmness. Obediently swallowing her "round white pill", she remarks; "I wish they gave me the syrup. It sends me off, you know, well, away faster" (92). One deducts from this remark that she prefers a comatose state to being awake, and compliantly takes this medication for its blackout effect.

In *Homegoing*, the first matriarch and the mother of Esi and Effia goes into a catatonic state after the raid of her newly adopted home by Fante warriors. Before escaping to Fante and becoming a wife to an influential Asante warrior, she is enslaved in Fante and possessed as a slave-wife. Her union in both domiciles produce two daughters, Esi and Effia consecutively. Her identity is very much contoured by the harrowing effects of colonial capitalist activities and anti-Black misogynistic violence that she opts for death over life. The raid uncovers her suppressed fragmented state, plunging her into an immobile, disconnected state with reality. Rather than escape with her daughter into the "woods" as directed by her husband, she chooses instead to be captured and killed, even if it means that her daughter "would inherit that unspeakable sense of loss" (Gyasi 42). In the final moment between mother and daughter, she is described as missing "large swaths of her spirit […] and no matter how much she loved Esi, and no matter how much Esi loved her, they both knew in that moment that love could never return what Maame had lost" (42). After Esi's capture, enslavement, and rape in the dungeon and transportation to the Americas, she also goes into a stoic and dissociative state, displaying no feeling towards her daughter's forced separation from her. She is described as unsmiling, solid and strong with a hardness of spirit that her daughter, Ness would always associate with real love. Even when she attempts to put on a smile, her lips are described as twitching weakly as though they are still attached to "that sadness that had once anchored her own mother's heart" (72). Gyasi's linkage of Esi's dissociative state with Maame's sadness acquires deeper meaning when placed in the context of intergenerational trauma—as trauma passed down as a result of a systemic event experienced by a group of people. Accustomed to a life of disempowered subjectivity, Esi is unable to accept gratitude or assistance and keeps her emotional distance from others.

In *We Need New Names, On Black Sisters' Street, A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*, the depiction of Black female characters' traumatized condition is tied

to their systemic contradictory positionalities, ontological fragmentation and collective disempowerment. Transatlantic misogynoir and colonial violence continue to shape Black women's identities even into the postcolonial era that it is impossible to miss its impact on their psychological constellation. While Sefi Atta's characterization of her protagonist in *A Bit of Difference* departs from the passionate and evocative depictions intimate with Black women's writings, it is necessary to concern oneself with why this is the case. The novel, an exploration of the life of a young professional African woman, straddling the boundaries of her upper class in her birth city Lagos and middle class in her migrant city London, is narrated in a clinical tone. Even though Deola occupies a privileged social class in both societies and is astute about the prejudices present in these two societies, there is a particular emotional dissociation from reality and repression about her that is impossible to miss. One however does not need to wonder for very long, as to what might be the cause of her emotional stasis and impenetrability. By suffusing Deola's subdued, emotionally distant character with a perceptive gaze, Atta captures the legacy of embodied knowledge that dominates her subjectivity. From the beginning, Deola assumes an impenetrable emotional comportment that defies every gesture of friendship from her co-workers and boss. She is also extremely careful about expressing her opinions, internal struggles, reservations and revealing her emotional state in order not to "come across as a whiner" (Atta 4). In a conversation with one of her white female co-workers, they both agree on a feminist issue in passing, yet Deola is careful to separate her feminist and feminine inclinations from Anne's. They find similarity and connection in Anne's disclosure of her pregnancy attempts, yet Deola is hesitant to "talk about her own urge to nest" in order to avoid her sentiment being treated as "the African woman's perspective" (13).

Naimah Zulmadelle Petigny in her essay on the psychophysical trauma histories and collective healing processes of Black women in the United States argues that "the articulation of race and space, uncanny historicity and gendered dynamics of colonial violence, intergenerational transmission of trauma, and unequal recognition of disparate traumatic histories" is the generational genesis of Black women's trauma (2014, 23). According to Petigny, acknowledging the decimation of Black female subjectivity and their present-day occupancy of the social space of disempowerment and subjection requires the framing of trauma beyond the 21st century stagnant Euro-American conceptual and historical frameworks that continue to minimize the scarring legacies of the racialized and gendered dimension of Black women's op-

pression. Petigny's critique corroborates my argument that everyday forms of institutional and casual racism and sexism have "left traces of trauma upon the physical, social, psychological, and psychic landscapes of Black women," many of which are unclaimed or disregarded because of the hegemonic abstraction of trauma and the normalization of racialized and gendered dimension of oppression (23). These epistemological shortcomings present an additional obstruction to Black women's liberational quest because they deny us the privilege of knowing and flagging our experiences of trauma as actual sources of embodied cultural pain. Petigny concludes that only in reviewing trauma discourse as traversing multiple historical spaces, and linking events of the past to current, ongoing currents of social conditions can Black women, who exist within a space that interacts with history differently because of their raced and gendered marginal status, begin the journey to recovery and healing (26–28).

Although Deola's psyche in *A Bit of Difference* is not as tortured as Tambu's, Nyasa's or Esi's in *Homegoing*, Deola's emotional stasis, aloofness and cautious contemplation is nevertheless a product of intergenerational trauma with material and affective undercurrent. Her emotional paralysis and indifference are even more so reinforced by her job as the director of internal audit at an international charity foundation. Her perceptive character cannot help but take notice of the postcolonial travails besieging the Africa continent, men, women, and children. On her trips, she encounters many racialized-gendered behaviors. She notices the American man who cautions an Indian man trying to cut the queue in Delhi yet allows another couple of loud Americans do exactly the same thing. She contemplates the action of a flight attendant in Atlanta who attends to a white man, who cuts the line. Further interrogating her conduct, she wonders if her emotional stasis is the outcome of "being misinterpreted and diminished" (Atta 17). As an African woman who is accustomed to being confronted with abiding humiliating representations of Africa and its people, I argue that Deola's deliberate stoic attitude is the only way she is able to shield herself from her embodied collective pain. "Expecting more would be like asking her to bury her head into a pile of dirt and willingly take a deep breath in" (12).

Just like Deola in *A Bit of Difference*, Darling, Ama, Sisi, Efe in *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Ifemelu and Aunt Uju in *Americanah* are battered with scars, losses and pains they try to hide, pretending normalcy. In *We Need New Names*, Darling, the young African female protagonist is a witness to considerable postcolonial tragedy, poverty, hopelessness, state oppression, and gender

violence in a ghetto called Paradise, somewhere in Zimbabwe. Achieving her dream of migrating to the US however does not change her hopeless situation, and she is confronted with additional layers of subjection that only complicates her hopelessness. Through Bulawayo's adept social commentary, these subjections are given life, and the reader is able to piece them together and connect them to larger patterns of power relations that exert themselves on "long-suffering postcolonial subjects" (Ngom 2020, 10). The United States is described as a place that betrays the illusion of these migrants from previously colonized countries. People from Zimbabwe, in trying to escape the scars left behind by colonialism, are made to go through even more trauma to achieve their goal of escape from postcolonial state violence. Getting an American visa and passport is described as "harder than crawling through the anus of a needle", and the characters all have to suffer through myriad forms of strict migration policies that speak to the fact of their being unwelcome (Bulawayo 240). In their home countries, boys sell their father's properties against their wishes, do menial jobs for months on end, and girls are sexually exploited by officials working at the passport office. Bulawayo also proceeds to draw a connection between colonialism's onslaught on the African continent and the horrors of transatlantic slavery in the Americas, and how people of African descent are left to deal with their trauma and survive in the wake of these legacies of colonial violence on their selfhood. Bulawayo describes America as a wretched place where "they took looted black sons and daughters those many, many years ago" and people live in "fear of evil" (241). Bulawayo establishes, in light of this transatlantic connection, that the desire to escape to America might not bode well for Africans' subjective security and sense of identity. Nevertheless, the desire to escape the legacy of violence on the continent is far greater than evaluating their right to spaces of safety as with ethical subjects not borne of coercive violence. Because of the nature of anti-Blackness, the structural violence witnessed by Africans on the African continent is simply reproduced in America, and they are locked into individual and systemic prisons, metaphorically and literally.

> We heard all this but we let it enter in one ear and leave through the other, pretending we did not hear. We would not be moved, we would not listen; we were going to America. In the footsteps of those looted black sons and daughters, we were going, yes, we were going. And when we got to America, we took our dreams, looked at them tenderly as if they were newly born children, and put them away; we would not be pursuing them. We would never

be the things we had wanted to be: doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers. No school for us, even though our visas were school visas. We knew we did not have the money for school to begin with, but we had applied for school visas because that was the only way out. Instead of going to school, we worked. Our Security cards said *Valid for work only with INS authorization*, but we gritted our teeth and broke the law and worked; what else could we do? What could we have done? What could anybody have done? And because we were breaking the law, we dropped our heads in shame; we had never broken any laws before. We dropped our heads because we were no longer people; we were now illegals (241–242).

For Darling, her identity is so contoured by the socio-historical and material effect of (post)colonial violence that it is impossible for her to feel connected to, or sympathy for anyone. In the fictional city of Paradise in Zimbabwe, she has witnessed so much structural violence in forms of repressive governance, racial and ethnic coerced removal, gentrification, and social precarity in forms of starvation, racial animosity, forced migration, scourge, and death. She is a witness to absent fathers and overworked mothers, her community forcefully removed from their homestead and their homes demolished, humiliating white-centric charities, her AWOL father withering away from the AIDS epidemic after his unexpected return from South Africa, her cousin suffering from lung disease contracted from digging for diamonds in the South African Madante mines, raging starvation that can only be relieved through guavas stolen from rich white neighborhoods, and a woman's corpse hanging from a tree. What emerges is a psychological laceration that extends beyond a simple "matter of internal psychic dynamics" and causes Darling to exteriorize stoic and dissociative comportment as interactive tools to these grotesque displays of large-scale suffering (Lloyd 2000, 212). There is nothing that says deeply traumatized interiority like Darling and her friends' reactions to the woman's corpse. After first scampering away at the first sighting, they return to steal her shoes to buy bread. Bulawayo's novel is imbued with deeply traumatized Black female characters, not surprising in the least, given the excruciating systemic suffering evoked in the entire pages. The women of Paradise, abandoned to care for the children following the demolition of their homes and migration of their husbands to neighboring countries for economic reasons, show signs of aloofness towards their children that speak to a traumatized state of mind. They leave their kids to wander around and barely glance at them. Another dramatization of intergenerational trauma experienced at the individual level, but

deeply connected to systemic (post)colonial issues is represented by Chipo, an eleven-year-old pregnant girl, who goes into a dissociative state as soon as her "stomach started showing" (Bulawayo 2). Even though she does not stop following her friends around, she refuses to engage even when directly spoken to. The adults of Paradise city, well aware of her condition and how this could have come to be, also refuse to ask the necessary questions. Through the character of Chipo, Bulawayo exposes this pattern of abuse suffered by Black girls and women, which are for the most case evaded by adults, even when they are aware of such atrocities. But most importantly, it shows the gendered impact of (post)colonial patriarchal violence on Black girls and women, and how stoicism and dissociation has become one of the ways for postcolonial female subjects to manage their deeply scarred subjectivities.

In the US, Darling scoffs at some people occupying a park, holding up "occupying" signs, pretending "they knew what suffering was" (254). She distances herself mentally from her co-workers and does not attempt to open and keep a communication line at her supermarket job. Even when she is aware that her co-workers expect suitable responses to their chitchats, she pretends to not know what they are talking about and replies with only "hmmn" at regular intervals (255). At her side job where she cleans for a wealthy white family, she expresses apathy to the plight of the teenage daughter who suffers from eating disorder, body image issues, depression, and suicidal thoughts. The socio-historical substance of Darling's traumatized condition is evident in the mockery she makes of the teenage girl:

> You have a fridge bloated with food so no matter how much you starve yourself, you'll never know real, true hunger. Look around you, and you have all these riches that you don't even need; upstairs, your bed is fit for a king; you go to Cornell, where you can be anything you want; you don't even have to clean up after yourself because I'm doing it for you, right now; you have a dog whose wardrobe I couldn't afford; and, what's more, you're here, living in your own country of birth, so just exactly what is your real problem? (268)

Most importantly, what this demonstrates is that even after Darling's migration to United States, she is already so deeply scarred that recovery is impossible. The novel ends on a note of final dissociation and stoicism due to contradictions she cannot resolve. Unable to travel home even for visit due to her undocumented status, Darling goes into a complete dissociative state from her friends and family: "It's hard to explain, this feeling; it's like there's two of me.

One part is yearning for my friends; the other part doesn't know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people I've never met" (210).

Just like Darling, Ifemelu's, Sisi's, Ama's and Efe's expectations of America and Belgium is crushed on arrival. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu immediately notices something different about her Aunt Uju who comes to pick her up at the airport. Aunt Uju's quick casual hug is bereft of intimacy, "as if it had been weeks rather than years since they had last seen each other" (Adichie 128). Aunt Uju, who used to be Ifemelu's closest confidante before her departure to America, now thoughtlessly complains about prioritizing Ifemelu's airport pick-up needs over her schoolwork. Whatever the case may be, it is obvious that she is under a lot of stress and this stress is connected to her settlement and survival in the United States. Thrust into the configuration of Blackness in the US in ways that are foreign, complex, and unambiguous, Aunt Uju and Ifemelu have to shoulder the intergenerational Black trauma that comes with Blackness and its racial subjecthood, whether they want to or not, because most of racial practices are based on phenotype. Their insertion into this master status is already decided by her common heritage of Blackness and is not up for negotiation. Rossanne Kennedy, in her project on the traumatic dimensions of colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, rightly argues that it is possibly only the deceptive psychological structure of colonialism that makes it difficult for the colonized to witness their own oppression (2020, 91). Aunt Uju immediately launches into survival tutorials that leave no space for Ifemelu's adjustment to a new social climate. Working three jobs alongside studying for her medical license leaves her no room for cheerfulness and sentimental bonding with both her son and Ifemelu. Her skin, eyes and spirit are described as "dry", "shadowed", and "bleached of color" and she complains of mental exhaustion (Adichie 132). Her awareness and acceptance of her racial inferiority and Black disadvantage is also passed to her son. The racial power dynamics surfaces in her interaction with her son. At the grocery store, she softens her tone when speaking to him in the presence of the white cashier. Her accent instinctively switches from an authoritative to an overeager "new persona, apologetic and self-abasing" one (133). The constant pressure of navigating and attempting to reconcile the white hegemonic social world with her subjugated identities would have her devalue her indigenous Igbo language for English. She implores Ifemelu to speak only English with her son: "Please don't speak Igbo to him," Aunty Uju said. "Two languages will confuse him." (134). In response to Ifemelu's consternation, she replies "This is America. It's different." (134).

In witnessing Aunt Uju's traumatized condition, the external narrator points out that "America had subdued her" (135). Aunt Uju's subjection is, however, not connected to America as simply a space of migrant newness with complex, albeit ethical interactions to be discovered. Her subjection is connected to a space that is built on a classification system of Black devaluation and white elevation. In essence, Aunt Uju's subjection is interwoven with her Blackness and femaleness. The American dream of belonging and inclusion is an illusion for African migrants. The dream of belonging and upward mobility for Aunt Uju comes with shedding, concealing, or replacing her cultural heritage and distinctiveness with a white standard of civilization. Even after she fulfils every obligation demanded of her, such as passing her medical license exam and securing a residency, subjective security continues to elude her. In Massachusetts, where she moves to with her prospective misogynistic partner, her fantasy of acclimatizing is crushed. At her workplace, she is confronted with racial abuse, invisibility and hyper-visibility that is deeply rooted in anti-Blackness and misogyny. Patients refuse to be treated by her on account of her Black femaleness and foreignness. Her accent is labeled incomprehensible by the pharmacist at her workplace. Dike, her son, is also confronted with racial microaggressions that interpellate him as aggressive and incompatible with the other white schoolchildren. From Aunt Uju's remonstrance to Ifemelu, it is evident that this is not an uncommon practice done to Black kids: "Kemi warned me about this. She said they tried to do it to her son in Indiana" (212). The trauma of struggling with her son for years to achieve stability is compounded by working, living, and answering to a racist environment that continually devalues them. This unresolvable contradiction between their self-identity and construction of their identity as Other culminates in a tortured psychology for Dike, compelling him to attempt suicide. Because Blackness is weaponized as something inferior and threatening, Aunt Uju's way of protecting him is to create a distance between him and his Black racialized social status in the US.

> Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said 'we black folk' and you told him 'you are not black'?" she asked Aunty Uju, her voice low because Dike was still asleep upstairs. They were in the kitchen of the condo, in the soft flare of morning light, and Aunt Uju, dressed for work, was standing by the sink and eating yoghurt, scooping from a plastic cup… You told him what he wasn't but you didn't tell him what he was (470).

Her justification for this parental judgment is that she "didn't want him to start behaving like these people and thinking that everything that happens to him is because he's black" (470). 'These people' being alluded to by her are African Americans. Going further, she does not acknowledge Dike's traumatized condition or connect his suicide to his racialized experience. Instead, she universalizes his mental illness as one borne from being young: "It is a clinical disease. Many teenagers suffer from it. [...] Three of my patients have attempted suicide, all of them white teenagers. One succeeded" (470). Nevertheless, Dike's suicidal attempt in the wake of all the events leading up to it demonstrates that he is traumatized by the amalgamation of their anti-Black experiences. In his case, as a child of a first-generation migrant, there is an unresolvable contradiction between his Black social status in the US and his non-racial foreign Africanness. Importantly, Aunt Uju's counter-discursive strategy to her son's anti-Black racist mistreatment is on two levels and parallels the two incidents I narrated in my introduction. Firstly, the counter-discursive strategy of distancing her son from his Blackness and Black people illustrates the ideology of respectability and the gaze of whiteness that circumscribe Black people's definition of themselves. Secondly, making a distinction between Dike as African and African Americans, illustrates the intra-fighting between Africans and African Americans in the US and the internalized misconceptions both groups have of each other. One could argue that Aunt Uju's adoption of this counter-discursive strategy in spite of her own lived reality (of working so hard yet failing at appeasing whiteness) is delusional. However, when placed in the context of her anti-Black racist and sexist experiences in the US leading up to her son's near suicide, one is able to reach the conclusion that this strategy is purely motivated by her instinct for her son's survival, with the violent system being colonialism and white supremacy.

Ifemelu is also not exempted from the trauma of enduring misogynoir and racial capitalism amongst many other manifestations of anti-Blackness. Her stay in the US is not without its immigration clauses that she must fulfil. Her inability to get a job makes her wonder if her race and foreignness is the reason. Like Aunt Uju and Dike, she also discovers that the lowliest status is designated to Blackness, and finding a way to negotiate her foreign Blackness with the operational Black subordinated identity in the US is peremptory. In her history seminar, an argument between the African American and African immigrant students point to the fact that there is some type of historical trauma impacting their attitudes and relational dynamics within their already subordinated Black community and larger population. A movie on the experiences

of enslaved Black people sparks a discussion on whether the N-word should or should not be bleeped out for the sake of authentic historical representation in popular culture. While the African immigrant students tether towards representing it in movies the way it has been used in history, albeit with specified conditions and limits, the African American students maintain that the use of the word in any form is offensive and dismissive of Black people's enslavement and suffering. The visible anguish suffered by Obinze's mother in Nsukka, Nigeria in the course of watching the same movie, prior to Ifemelu's relocation to the US, also demonstrates the historical connection Africans on the continent share with African Americans vis-a-vis the overarching legacy of imperialist white supremacist capitalist structure and the trans-generational trauma that could result from this racial relation.

Like Deola in *A Bit of Difference* who avoids bonding with her colleagues to evade the crisis of misinterpretation and belittlement commonly experienced by Black people, Ifemelu finds herself in similar emotionally repressive situation. However, she finds her own way to resolve the contradictions of her identities. By joining an Association for African Students and congregating with other Africans, she is able to maximize the potential of a safe space and find some type of relief in their constellation of similarities. In this space, Ifemelu and her fellow African immigrant students are able to reconcile their US ascribed marginalized Black status by the dominant white society with their dehumanized Africanness within both the Black community and larger population. In the welcome talk given to the new members, the complexity of their social status as foreign Africans under the structure of US operational white supremacy is captured. Making friends with African American students in the spirit of "true pan-Africanism" is encouraged even though the possibility that they could be confronted with white supremacist insults targeted at their Africanness is inevitable (172). This friendly instruction is congruent with Obinze's mother's palpable anguish to the movie characterization of African American's pain, and the overlap of imperialism, colonialism and slavery as the glue that binds Black people across national borders, regardless of intra-community anti-Black manifestations. Nevertheless, African migrant students are aware that their hierarchy within the overarching white supremacist structure is additionally layered and this pan-African spirit or shared Africanness does not protect them from potential negative African collocations like "Mandigo or a booty scratcher" (173). They find comfort in mimicking commentaries they have all had to endure, as well as mocking the state of their diasporic conditions:

They mimicked what Americans told them: You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa. And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was mockery born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again. Here, Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself (171).

In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, the four female characters—Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce all from different social statuses and cultural heritages are connected under the overwhelming shadow of the legacy of transatlantic misogynoir and racial capitalism on their consensual sex work and settlement in Belgium. They, including their Madam, are all described as emotionally contained and comfortable with the little they know about each other, regardless of the fact that they share a living space and interlocking identities. Before migrating to Belgium, Efe's imagination of Belgium is similar to Darling, Aunt Uju and Ifemelu's euphoric, sterilized imagination of the United States. In the course of living in Antwerp, her euphoric imagination however undergoes a post-migratory transformation, and this is evident in her description of Antwerp as a "botched dream" (Unigwe 24). Unigwe sheds light on the plights of underprivileged Black girls and women, and how the intersection of their race, gender and class are towering factors contributing to their traumatized conditions in the face of the materiality of their exploitation and hyper-visibility. The young African female characters are all manipulated with the promise of relocating abroad and the bountiful opportunities that abound there. The dominance of imperialist white supremacist capitalist structure and the circling ubiquity of transatlantic anti-Black misogyny is reinforced in the African male characters' reliance on the exploitation of the African female characters. They are described as abroad returnees with "wallets full of foreign currency" scouting for marriageable Nigerian women who are in the nursing profession: "The British NHS depends on our fucking nurses, innit?" (29). And they always easily found willing women, excited by the idea of leaving their life and family to travel abroad in any capacity. The excitement of these girls and women is akin to Efe's reaction when asked by the pimp if she would be interested in travelling to Belgium: "If I wan go abroad, Oga Dele? Anybody dey ask pikin if de pikin wan' sweet? Who did not want to go abroad? People were born with the ambition and people died trying to fulfil that ambition" (81).

In the enthusiasm of these girls and women is an implication that there is a pre-conceived idea of abroad, an expectation of the benefits that could be accrued from travelling abroad, and this pre-conceived idea can be traced to the imposing structure of colonialism, neocolonialism, paternalism, and racialized violence. For African women in the novel, their race, gender, and class marginal status are mirrored in their solicitations. They are exploited for the palatability of both Black men and non-Black men: "He says a woman can earn money there. They like Black women there. [...] And as for liking Black women, Dele had told her they were in great demand by white men, tired of their women and wanting a bit of colour and spice" (84). Embedded in their solicitations for marriage or sex is the weaponization of their Black womanhood. Within the system of white supremacy and patriarchy in which they are forced to thrive, their bodies are disempowered in their construction in binary opposition to white femininity. The ramification of their sex work in the framework of intersectionality reveals the resulting difference in their oppression, so therefore cannot be viewed as liberating for them in the way it could possibly be for white women. Following the death of Sisi and the discovery of her body, their Madam is described as nonchalant to the gravity of the news. She burns incense in the house to keep Sisi's ghost away and orders the women to return to work. The women are bitter at this treatment of Sisi's death as "nothing more than a temporary discomfort" but are overpowered by their own helplessness and the system of sexual violence that holds them hostage (39). In the face of their helplessness to the loss of their housemate, their stoicism becomes even more pronounced in their determination to secure better lives for themselves. Their desire to survive becomes even more heightened amidst the terror of their social conditions and undocumented status. The murder of Sisi and the indifference of the authorities to her murder serves as a timely reminder of their unimportance. These displays of indifference by both their Madam and the authorities affect them emotionally, reproducing a form of hardness that exemplifies a traumatized legacy. Interrogating their happiness is a challenging topic for them. Their understanding of their social lives and conditions is very ambivalent, but they remain grateful to Oga Dele, their Lagos pimp for giving them a surviving chance that is unavailable to them back home.

Leading up to their arrival in Belgium, they are all described as determined and enduring in the face of their various hardships. Efe is sexually exploited and impregnated at sixteen by a forty-five-year-old man. Ama is raped by her stepfather from the age of eight. Joyce is raped at age eight and her family mur-

dered by the military in her war-torn country of Sudan. Sisi is unable to secure a job after graduation from the university. Using a comprehensive socio-historical framework to understand these women's hardships and social lives reveals the anti-Black sexist overtone in the commonality of their experiences. This overtone in their commonality of experience imbues their traumatic condition and consciousness with an interdependent foundation that cannot be overlooked. Their embodied experience of poverty coupled with their race, gender and migrant status leads to a rupture between their internal and external worlds. Their alienation from subjective security both home and abroad impacts them ideologically. These material conditions of their identity formation and exploitation in turn disrupts the authenticity of their bodily agency and consent. This is evident in Ama's sentiment towards her solicitation for instance. Her stepfather had repeatedly raped her until her first menstrual period, so being provided the choice of having sex for money abroad was empowering in some way for her. However, manifesting in this rationalization is the trauma of being subjugated under the system of sexual violence. Their sexual and racial autonomy is the price they all pay to have a claim to their power and financial freedom. In eight years, Efe would complete her payment to Dele and transition to the position of a Madam. She would reiterate to Joyce on the necessity of being stoic and detached, evincing that stoicism is a survival politics developed from existing on the margins: "If you become too involved, you won't last a day. And it's not just the girls. The police too. If you're too soft they'll demand more than you're willing to give" (40).

The same intersecting power dynamics that inform Tambu and her fellow Black schoolmates' angst about how their conduct is perceived by their white teachers and schoolmates in *A Book of Not*, also saturates Esi and Effia's divergent life trajectories in *Homegoing*, Deola's cautious rapport with her white colleagues in *A Bit of Difference*, Aunt Uju's self-abasing tone in the presence of white people and Ifemelu's moderated diversity lecture to appease her white audience in *Americanah*, and Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama's consensual sex-work in *On Black Sisters' Street*. Turning to intergenerational trauma conceptualization, it is worth recalling that history and cumulative ordeal on a massive scale is central to the assessment of group adverse behavioral reactions and interactive dynamics. Mapping the trauma symptoms of the Black female characters in the context of the systemic character of the sum of their experiences and struggles, reveals identifiable distortion to their physical and mental constellation, and common relational dynamics like stoicism and dissociation that cannot be conceived as an isolated personality issue. Broadly speaking, for these Black

girls and women, irrespective of class, balancing the demands of their unre-
solvable contradictions is especially a difficult process fraught with both inten-
tional and arbitrary resolutions. A pile-up of disappointment leaves Tambu in a
state of complete disenchantment and despondency. She quits her job with no
confidence in the future. Darling continues to exist at the fringes of her host so-
ciety, neither able to return home nor integrate because of her undocumented
status. Deola becomes disillusioned with the asymmetrical assimilation script
she has had to play for years and decides to quit her middle-class job and return
home. Ifemelu suffers layers after layers of discontent, makes some changes
like putting an end to faking an American accent, but finally also decides to re-
turn home. Aunt Uju becomes disillusioned and moves to a new city to start
afresh. In the wake of Sisi's murder, Efe, Ama and Joyce recognize the bleak-
ness of their situation and decide to comply patiently with the terms of their
exploitation until their debts are completed. Efe becomes a Madam, Ama opens
a boutique in Lagos and Joyce establishes a school in Yaba, Lagos named after
Sisi.

3.3 Black Women, Visible Histories, and Gendered Trajectories

Having fictionally interrogated the larger narrative of Black female identity
under the overarching phenomenon of imperialist white supremacist patriar-
chal capitalist structure and the resulting legacy of cultural trauma, this sub-
chapter explores women of African descent's agency as they are shaped by a
synthesis of social arrangements and institutions. In the undertaking of the
project of interrogating the Otherness of Black women, I am mindful of the
slippery slope of constructing the category of Black women as a monolithic
oppressed group and re-instating Western feminist scholarship as an even-
tuality. Thus, this sub-chapter aims to spotlight Black female subjectivities,
confront dis(continuities) in the discourse of Black female oppression, address
the myriads of shifting and unfolding privileges and limitations that identity-
based oppression describes, and remedy the ills of white feminism that has
over the years catered to women's lived reality based solely on gender. In light
of the socio-historical processes of colonialism and imperialism that has left
most of African societies severely disrupted and fragmented, my analysis of
the characters' varying privileges and limitations is contextualized within a
progressive continuum—from traditional through colonial interruption to
present-day reality. More so, using texts that are categorized as diasporic liter-

atures due to their trans-geographical pre-occupations, allows me to traverse geographical borders, and carefully account for the dialogical relationship between the African continent and the African diaspora in the assessment of the African female characters' identities and agential capacities.

For the sake of clarity given the peculiarity of colonial and postcolonial issues besieging the African continent and people and aided by the pre-independence and post-independence narrative diegesis of the novels, I section my analysis of the novels into two parts. *The Book of Not* and *Homegoing*'s pre-colonial and colonial narrative diegesis will provide insight into African women's identities and agencies as interpellated by old Indigenous forms of cultural structures, the socio-historical processes of colonialism and the (in)coherence of both. In *A Bit of Difference*, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Americanah*, my engagement with character agency is steeped in the plethora of legitimate ideological and social spaces in relation to the articulation of individuality and re-invention of the self that is reminiscent of 20th century modernity. What is particularly striking in the works of Atta, Adichie, and Unigwe is the presence of additional social and political identities that go beyond traditional ethnic and cultural affiliations. These emerging identities reflect the narrative temporality intertwined with 20th-century modernity. As we consider these shifts and alterations in social amalgamation; similarly, there appears to be a dynamism and volatility to the status of women that transcend their culture-bound identities and roles. Amidst the backdrop of sociological categories specific to the African and African diasporic societies, in the form of ethnic affiliations, racial solidarity, community coalition, and extended family affinity, there appears to be even a larger emphasis on individuality and reinvention of the self.

3.3.1 Gender and Sexual Structures: Pre-colonial Social Logic and Colonial Disruption

By narrating African female characters' agential capacities within the networks of pre-colonial and colonial discursive structures, Dangerembga and Gyasi provide insights into the gendered complexities of pre-colonial and colonial social formations. Their narrative structures set the stage for the refreshing process of connecting the present shared reality of African women to the past, establishing the idea that the shared conditions of African women go way back and should not be separated and contained into isolated happenings. For instance, in the first few pages of *The Book of Not*, we learn that Tambu's Western educational privilege is only accessible to her after the death of her

brother. This immediately signals the presence of women's inferiority in the traditional discursive space. However, a comprehensive reading of the knots of her identity would reveal that her perceived irrelevance within her Indigenous familial setting is stimulated by the colonial epistemes of male hegemony. Although not much reference is made to women's positions and roles prior to colonialism, the deference accorded to Tambu's uncle, Babamukuru, by the extended family to decide Tambu's fate as a result of his Western education combined with his seniority reveals the manifestations of variegated power dynamics in the "newly created colonial public sphere" of Rhodesia (Oyeronke 1997, 123).

In the opening scene, Tambu returns to the village with Babamukuru at the request of the village elders to face trial for his perceived collaboration with the colonial power. The gender dynamics dramatized in this village scene reveals that gender operates differently, and there exists dialogical relationship between African men and women. At the local level, the women are not portrayed as invisible, helpless victims or relegated to the margin whenever they appear in the narration. Rather, we see indications of characters' active participation and assertion within their family and community. Mai, Tambu's uneducated mother, contrary to expectation, is self-assertive and opinionated. On the contrary, Babamukuru's British-educated trained African wife, Maiguru, is subjugated and complaint. In addition, the perpetual state of nervousness and inferiority plaguing Tambu has no command over Netsai, her younger sister, who resides in the village. In the severity of the war between the colonial power and Natives, Netsai joins the guerrila resistance in the capacity of a soldier and is at the same time courted happily for marriage. She is described as a confident girl, walking with "a joyful stride" and her "gun belt rolling around her hip like a string of beads" (Dangarembga 15).

Contrastingly, Tambui and her schoolmates' contributions to the war effort for the Rhodesian forces (colonial side) only involves knitting and sewing. Juxtaposing Netsai's war participation in her local space with Tambui's at her white school demonstrates that the conception of the female body in both cultures, and the extent to which it is implicated in social positioning, differs exponentially. Mai vocalizes her opinions on issues to everyone around her. Even if she is dismissed for whatever reason like in the case of Babamukuru enrolling her daughter against her wishes, there is every indication that she does not ideologically consider herself a helpless victim or second-class subject. From the miniscule glimpse we have into the relationship between Mai and her husband, we also see a certain level of visibility and self-assuredness that is ab-

sent in Maiguru and Babamukuru's relationship despite or on account of their Western educational status. Mai's relationship with her children is built on a certain kind of definiteness that requires little to no male approval. She advises Tambu on the appropriate way to comport herself at the meeting and quietens her youngest daughter's intrusive assessment of the situation: "I said be quiet! Or else he'll come to you!' hissed Mai. [...] Rambani shrunk against her mother who had put the fear of the Mukoma into her" (13). Moreover, when Mai persists in goading Tambu about her perceived Western superciliousness, her husband does not directly silence her. Instead, he tactfully changes the subject. Even though it is a tumultuous period, with devastating conflicts on both sides that finally dismembers one of her daughters, there is no indication that Mai requires the protection of her husband for survival or experience social limitations as consequence of her womanhood. In fact, she is neither accompanied to the meeting by her husband nor is the meeting evoked as significantly gendered. If there is anyone, who would be conceived of as positioned on the peripheral of the narration, it would be Baba, her husband who is curiously not positioned in the center of his nuclear home like Babamukuru is positioned in his own western-oriented home.

Contrastingly, under the most favorable circumstances, Maiguru is treated with an oversight, and at worst, like an inconvenience in her familial space. Repeatedly, she alters her voice, making it even more agreeable or less combative when talking to Babamukuru. On one occasion, when Babamukuru greets Tambu before her, she calls attention to this oversight by "sweetening her voice to smother a pout" in her ensuing "Good evening my lord" salutation (80). She attends expediently to all of her family's needs and waits anxiously for Babamukuru to acknowledge her effort: "Maiguru picked up a dishing out spoon and held it in a hovering, indeterminate fashion, so that if Babamukuru appeared to want to eat immediately, she could dig rapidly into a serving dish" (85). One of her attempts to pacify his bad mood is met with rebuke: "Mai! He silenced her tersely" (88). On another occasion, her difference in opinion angers Babamukuru greatly that he calls out her opinionated decorum as unbefitting of a woman: "Mai, that is not what a good woman does, nurturing those kinds of spirits that pull down families" (178). On one of the few times he agrees with her, his agreement is described as tinged by "dint of the negative which he so frequently employed" when speaking to her (177). Maiguru's daughter Nyasa, in a discussion with Tambu, also hints that Mai's womanhood is pathologized at the mission school where she teaches. She discloses that even though her local teachers persistently commit grammatical errors in their teachings, they

might easily be refusing to ask her mother for pointers because of her femaleness: "Imagine that, having to go back to the class and say yes, this is correct, a woman told me" (118). Even though she has a degree from London and is conceived of as an elite, in this social context of British colonial educational system, the pattern of social interaction demonstrates that maleness is superior, and it is within the bounds of this gender system that she suffers acute subjugation. Maiguru's performance of her gender and exclusion under the imperial white supremacist patriarchal structure of power validates Oyeronke's submission that "the paradox of the imposition of Western hegemony on African women is that the elite women who derive class privileges from the legacy of the colonial situation appear to suffer from the ill-effects of male dominance the most" (1997, 155).

On the other hand, in Yaa Gyasi's narrative timespan of pre-colonial to imperial activities and transatlantic slavery, we vividly witness and process the African females' agential capacities within a plethora of legitimate ideological and social structures. In the local sphere as represented in the novel, girls' and women's agential capacities are impacted by a plethora of social categorizations and cultural particularities, lending meanings, narratives, and affects that extend beyond the imposing shadow of an absolute narrative of female oppression. Effia and Esi, two half-sisters born into different circumstances in the onset of imperial interference on the continent, are represented as exponentially shaped by the (in)coherence of the gendered complexities of structural power. Effia is nurtured by Cobbe, her father, and stepmother, Baaba with the plan that she will be married to a prestigious warrior and the next chief of the land, as soon as she sees her first menstrual blood. Esi, on the other hand, is born to an Asante warrior, after her mother, serving as a house-girl in Cobbe's house, escapes from Fante to Asante. The common thread that unites their agential capacities is their relevance and visibility as young girls within their individual Native spaces prior to British imperialism. Effia is occasionally beaten and silenced by Baaba. While one might be tempted to jump to the conclusion that her differential treatment from her younger brother is tied to her femaleness, we learn in later chapters that her mistreatment is tied to her status as a non-biological daughter. Baaba's mistreatment of Effia causes a huge fight between her and Cobbe, and the fight is described as prolonging "into the night" (Gyasi 4). Gyasi's description of the fight, I argue echoes the forms of pre-colonial relational dynamic that existed between husbands and wives. Reading the conflict of Baaba and Cobbe in parallel to the disagreements between Maiguru and Babamukuru, and Maiguru's conciliatory disposition in

The Book of Not, illuminates which gender system demands silence and absolute submission from the woman.

Like Netsai in *The Book of Not*, Effia is excited about the potential shift in her identity that would follow the arrival of her menstrual blood. In the local context, the menstrual blood is epitomized as a positive indicator of womanhood, to be publicly celebrated. One of the secondary female characters, in preparation for her marital rite, is described as religiously rubbing "shea butter all over her body, underneath her breasts and between her legs" (5). Effia and her family, also eagerly awaiting her first blood is showered with gifts and requests for her hand in marriage. This cultural celebration of women's sexuality is absent in Tambui's Western-controlled school system. The colonial school system is severely gendered, with the boys' school located at an appropriate distance from the girls' school. The uniform standard for the girls is designed to conceal any excessive indication of their blossoming femininity. Their undergarments are also severely monitored for any appearance of "sexiness", and they are taught the "permutations and limits of decorum" (Dangarembga 62). This is quite the reverse in the local context. Sexuality of girls and women are abundantly woven into the fabric of human expression, not something to be hidden, controlled, or ridiculed. This symbolic disposition towards female sexual freedom is made evident and continuously reinforced in numerous interpersonal contexts in *Homegoing*. Esi, for instance, sleeping in a corner of her mother's hut, is a witness to her parents' sexual intimacy on multiple occasion. The Native wives casually discussing their sexual relationship dynamic also suggests dissimilar conception of sexual relations between them and their white husbands.

Abena, another female character, unabashedly pursues sexual relations with her married lover. Even though their pre-marital sexual intimacy is not deemed acceptable by the village custom, the code of behavior on sexuality is neither particularly gendered nor are sexual activities conceived as repulsive. In their early childhood, Abena and her childhood male friend guilelessly explore their bodies, imitating their parents' sexual behavior: "Ohene had discovered that the stick between his legs could perform tricks. […] See? He said as they watched it lift when she touched it. They had both seen their fathers' this way, Ohene on those days his father went from one wife's hut to the next, and Abena in the days before she got her own hut" (Gyasi 136). What seems to be a taken-for-granted human phenomenon is however conceived differently when Abena resettles at the missionary church in Kumasi and adopts the Christian belief. In the wake of her premarital pregnancy, she is treated as a heathen

by the missionary. Her daughter, raised by the same missionary, later learns that it is her mother's refusal to consider her premarital sexual relationship and pregnancy a sin, which she must be purged of, that eventually leads to her death during a baptism mishap: "She came to us pregnant – you, her sin – but still she wouldn't repent. She spit at the British. She was argumentative and angry. I believe she was glad of her sins. I believe she did not regret you or your father, even though he did not care for her as a man should" (189).

This gendered dialogical relationship is also signified in the family domain. The familial space is not divided into superior male and inferior female domains. Cobbe defers to Baaba on the issue of Effia's womanhood, nervously waiting to be informed of her first blood: "Everyday he would ask Baaba what was happening with Effia, and everyday Baaba would reply that she was not yet ready" (13). When Effia inquires as to why one of her friends is being married off to a white man, Baaba's reply "because her mother says so" conveys two cultural logics that undergird both Baaba and Effia's relational identity, as well as their relevance in the Fante society (13). One, women's inclusion and participation is fundamental to the social structure. Two, hierarchy is age-related, illustrating Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's argument that the ranking of individuals in numerous precolonial societies "depended first and foremost on seniority, which was usually defined by relative age" (1997, xiii). Baaba as a mother fulfils her roles in ways that are rather complementary. Cobbe yearns to see his daughter married to a man of their village rather than a white man but must wait for his wife's clearance. This complementarity of the social order is proved by Baaba's decision to withhold the news of Effia's menstrual blood from Cobbe, with the aim of averting his plan to marry her off to someone from their lineage. In Cobbe's final act of morosely surrendering to Baaba's choice in the governor of Cape Coast castle and a white man, is a confirmation of Oyěwùmí's African-centred sociological analysis that social identity was more relational and less biologically determined in the local context (Oyěwùmí 1997, 13).

For Esi, until her capture by Fante soldiers and sale to the British soldiers, her life is little to no different from Effia's. In celebration of her birth, her warrior father throws a big outdoor feast that lasts four nights. She is doted on and spoiled by her father. Just like Effia, she is depicted as curious about the imperial activities involving her village. As the daughter of a prominent warrior of the Asante tribe, she is regarded as someone prestigious, "not some common girl to be ordered about" (35). For Maame, her mother, there is a notable shift in her agency. From being a slave in the Fante kingdom, she escapes and becomes the third wife to the 'Big Man' of Asante kingdom. She is described as lucky to

be married to someone like 'Big Man', even without a family or background that can be traced. The regard for her wife status includes choosing a house girl or boy from among the tribal war prisoners paraded through the village monthly. She refuses, insisting that Esi could help with the house chores, but her husband rejects this subordinate consideration of his daughter. Maame's agential shift, Big man's classification of Esi, as well as the choice of a non-gendered house-help for Maame indicate that in the Asante kingdom, people are ranked according to the wins and losses of tribal war, and not according to their gender. A warrior today could potentially become a slave tomorrow if captured in a tribal raid. This fluctuating shift in the social arrangement is evidenced in the imperial-instigated raid of the Asante tribe by the Fante tribe. With the raid of the Asante tribe, a transformation occurs yet again in the Natives' social classification and hierarchy. The warriors are killed and captured in large number.

In the case of Effia, a simple colonial gender-assimilated analysis of Cobbe's plan and Effia's betrothal might conceive Effia as oppressed and the Fante culture as sexist. But in accordance with Oyěwùmí, who argues extensively in her intellectual works on Yoruba local knowledge systems for concepts to be re-examined within the culture and philosophy of origin in order to avoid the trap of distortion that has befallen the aggregate of African experiences and history, further deconstruction of Cobbe's desire for his daughter reveals the (in)coherence of the systems of power working actively in the local space. Situating Effia's anticipated womanhood, Cobbe's desire for his daughter, and the metaphor of gift giving and bride price within the independent logic of the Fante culture, suggests a different interpretation, one that does not rest on the preconceived assumption of a universal patriarchy and a one size fits all women's historical exclusion from the public sphere. This logic or frame of reference of the Fante culture is identifiable in their social relations and ideology—that both male and female identities are visible and quantifiable, and their development into men and women are equally revered and celebrated. Cobbe's speech to Effia, on the metaphor of bride price paid by the village men versus white men, conveys that this metaphor acquires a new characteristic and effect in the new imperial social order.

> Her father nodded. 'The white men live in the Cape Coast Castle. There, they trade goods with our people.' 'Like iron and millet?' Her father put his hand on her shoulder and kissed the top of her forehead, but when he pulled away the look in his eyes was troubled and distant. 'Yes, we get iron and millet, but we must give them things in return. That man came from Cape Coast to

marry Adwoa, and there will be more like him who will come and take our daughters away. But you, my own, I have bigger plans for you than to live as a white man's wife. You will marry a man of our village (7).

The Fante married women's discussion on the difference between being married to their local men and white men also enunciates this point. While one of the women, once married to a white soldier, reveals that white soldiers pay huge dowry and take good care of them, having her daughter be married to the chief of the village and staying close to her is still a better option. In addition, the evaluation of the white soldier's marital obligation is inundated with racist perception of the Native women's bodies and sexuality:

> "I don't know what their British wives were doing. I tell you, my husband looked at me like I was water and fire, and every night he had to put out" (9). Effia eventually marries the governor, and the brideprice offer is "more than had been offered for any other Fante woman in this village or the next" (15).

The epistemological shift caused by imperialism does not however end with the issue of bride price. The opinion that white soldiers take good care of African women "like they have never been with a woman before" (9) assumes capacious meanings under an intersectional framework. This imperial incursion, as represented in the novel, establishes new concepts of racial and gender relations and fundamentally alters the ideological and social logic of the Fante society. This alteration causes profound ramification for the women of the Asante and Fante tribes. Through slave trading between the British and the Native tribes, a new and rigid form of stratification along race and gender lines is established, with the Fante and Asante women embodying new social categories as racialized Natives and inferior women. When Effia asks after the activities of the village men with the British officers, her brother's reply "It's the business of men" communicates a new form of social organization or public space that expunges women from the center (12).

This is in line with Oyěwùmí's remark that "the creation of a public sphere in which only men could participate was the hallmark and symbol of the colonial process" (1997, 154). Furthermore, the chief's agreement to withdraw his marriage proposal is a manifestation of the layered oppression rooted in colonialism. The Native females become objectified pawns for a capitalist economic system set in motion by imperialism: "But I see that you are right. If the white

man wants her, he may have her. All the better for our business with them. All the better for the village" (15). This combination of racial and gender power dynamics is established in the relationship between the Native wives and the white men. They are called 'wenches' and not 'wives', and they and their off-springs are excluded from the wills. The reason being that they are not regarded as equal to white women in the colonial hierarchy, and their wife status holds no legitimacy in the colonial order (19). This new classification of the Native women obliterates whatever symbol of reverence was once ingrained in their culture of bride price, and the white soldiers' payments can be conceived as an appropriation and misrepresentation of the tribes' culture. Oyěwùmí's per-spective that the forms of oppression that flowed from colonization for African females is rooted in the "hierarchical race/gender relations of the colonial situ-ation," as opposed to the commonly postulated feminist scholarship of African women suffering double colonization from both colonial domination and In-digenous African tradition, supports this textual analysis (1997, 122).

Reading the experiences, rationalization, and politics of the tribes through the lens of Crenshaw's intersectionality and Hudson-Weems Africana wom-anism, articulates an extraneous complexity in their succeeding interrelation-ships. With imperial activities thriving in the pre-colonial societies, the Native women's identity, agency, role, and relationship with their men begin to un-dergo profound modification. According to both Crenshaw's analytic tool and Hudson-Weems's theory, the historical oppression of African women neces-sitates an intersectional approach to their quest for liberation and selfhood. Hudson-Weems vigorously argues that making gender the primary or most critical issue portends either an effortless rationalization based on negative personal experiences or a certain ignorance about the history of African so-cieties and ramifications of feminism. However, in the discourse of social or-ganizations and epistemologies, one must avoid the conundrum of using indi-vidual experiences to generalize or eclipse cultural or group attributes (2020). Going by this, a similar thread that binds Kimberlé Crenshaw, Clenora Hud-son-Weems and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critical works is the argument that fem-inist pursuit for women of African women must engage within our distinctive forms of oppression and at the same time must not misrepresent the social or-ganization of our culture or eclipse the interpretation of one with another, as it has always been, with Western particulars applied as universality.

In Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Esi is imprisoned in the dungeon of the same castle in which Effia is married and living as an illegitimate wife. The realiza-tion that women who look like her are imprisoned in the dungeon of her house,

communicates the limitations of her identity as an African woman, and privileges as a 'wench'. Her supplication to her white husband that she be returned home is met with the response "your home is no better" (Gyasi 17). This statement illustrates that the victimization of the Native women is connected to a combination of their femaleness and Blackness, and that Effia's perceived class privileges gained from her proximity to colonial power might not be an empowering one after all. Similarly, in a comprehensive theorization of Africana womanism, Hudson-Weems corroborates that the problems of African women are not inflicted upon them exclusively because they are women, but first and foremost because they are Black, and additionally because they are women living in a male-dominated society (2020, 19). Effia comprehends the implication of imperial domination and is glad to be on one side of her husband's "meanness and not another" (Gyasi 17).

Over the years, Effia'a and James's affection for each other begin to grow. They teach each other their languages, English and Fante, and express their love for each other. Their private life as well continues to be contoured by both overt and covert power dynamics, indicating that for African women, the private is deeply impacted by sociopolitical structures. Effia is aware that her husband has a wife and two children in England, who he is beholden to and maintains communication with. The letters from his family in England, delivered at unpredictable intervals, compels brief aloofness on the part of James, but things go back to normal after a few days. James's behavioral change placed in the context of James's Western culture and Christian religious belief is understandable given that polygamy is a forbidden concept. The white soldiers' rationalization of their action of marrying the Native women entails withholding the wife label from them in order to create a differentiation between their white wives and Native wives, and also "so that they would not get in trouble with their god" (19). If polygamy is a forbidden concept, this implies that their marriage to the Native women is non-binding and their payments of bride price is only appropriated for their own benefit, at the expense of the Native women. Effia recognizes that she is a nobody in the Western cultural context in the way she would have been a somebody had she been married to one of her Native men. Regardless of her class privileges that comes with being married to the Governor and her emotional bond with her husband, it appears that Effia discerns that the patriarchal process of imperialism institutes her non-recognition:

> Effia knew she was not supposed to care for James, and she kept hearing her father's words echoing through her mind, how he had wanted more for her

than to be the Fante wife of a white man. She remembered, too, how close
she had come to really being someone. Her whole life Baaba had beat her
and made her feel small, and she had fought back with her beauty, a silent
weapon, but a powerful one, which had led her to the feet of a chief. But
ultimately, her mother had won, cast her out, not only of the house but of
the village entirely, so that now the only other Fantes she saw regularly were
the spouses of the other soldiers (19).

This differentiation of cultural logic is also denoted in the conversation be-
tween Cobbe and one of the British soldiers who requested to have a trans-
lated tour of the village. The British soldier has difficulty comprehending the
social organization of the Fante culture—that a man can be married to more
than one woman, and each wife with her children has her own personal hut.
In the Fante culture, women as wives do not witness the kind of irrelevance,
obscurity and belittlement suffered by the Native women in relation to their
white husbands, and there would be no need for any pejorative re-definition
of their identities as wives. Just like Netsai, who is able to participate in the
capacity of an armed soldier in the war against the Rhodesian usurpation in
The Book of Not, the Native women in *Homegoing* are defined by multiple catego-
rizations that extends beyond occupying the domestic space as the appendages
of men. These categorizations are distinguishable in the social organization of
the communities. The Fante and Asante world is clearly not dichotomized into
private and public spaces that function according to male superiority and fe-
male subordination. Power is shared collectively. There exists a strong bond
between the Native woman and her family, culture, and community, and it is
in these relational dynamics that the sum of women's identities can be extrapo-
lated. The women are economically independent through their ownership and
cultivation of lands. Collective growth is elevated over individualism and dele-
gation of responsibilities is done according to this guiding principle.

Just as war is fought by the warriors in the spirit of the Asante or Fante, so is
cooking done publicly to nourish the spirit of the warriors. In one of the village
scenes, the mutability of gender is expressed in the social arrangement. While
the younger crowd of men organize to fight against the British's attempt to
claim the "Golden Stool" of the Asante kingdom, the village women and old men
assemble to cheer their spirit (Gyasi 182). Furthermore, the Queen mother is
described as mobilizing the women in case the men refuse to fight against the
British's infringement. One gets the sense that women are not excluded from
public spaces, and the logic of social hierarchy is not centered on male superi-

ority. Women hold positions on their own recognition such as esteemed positions of queen mother and eldest daughters of warriors and sovereign kings. They are also incorporated into the extended family with significant roles to play. In the aftermath of Effia's marriage and estrangement with her family, Fiifi, Effia's half sibling, educates her middle-aged son who comes visiting:

> You were in England too long, Quey. Maybe you have forgotten that here, mothers, sisters, and their sons are most important. If you are chief, your sister's son is your successor because your sister was born of your mother but your wife was not. Your sister's son is more important to you than even your own son (68).

What is striking about this is that women have multiple identities and roles not tied in any way to male dominance, and wife is just one of the many social roles of women, just as husband. Even though both Native men and women's identities bear the repercussion of imperial capitalist relations, the repercussion for Native women is their total exiling to the newly created private sphere vis-a-vis the silencing of their other many pre-colonial indigenous identities. The complementary bond Effia shares with her community is disrupted with her marriage to James. The totality of her existence is concentrated on her identity as a wife and appendage to James. Though she retains a principal precolonial attribute of community by communing with the other Native wives of the white soldiers, there is an absence of enfranchisement in this activity. It is only a way for her to repossess some of her cultural particulars like "be near someone who understood her, to hear the comforting sounds of her regional tongue" (21). Her other possible gendered and non-gendered identities do not survive under the new system. Her new role entails bearing children for James and complying to the colonial racial and gendered arrangement, which marginalizes her both as a Native and a woman, and at the same time elevates her above her fellow Native women locked in the dungeon. The social logic of the Fante tribe is illustrated in the comparison she draws between her own flexible understanding of the world and James's dichotomous conceptualization, following James's strong disapproval of her fertility roots on the grounds that they are un-Christianly: "The need to call this thing 'good' and this thing 'bad', this thing 'white' and this thing 'black', was an impulse that Effia did not understand. In her village, everything was everything. Everything bore the weight of everything else" (23).

This Fante social logic is also represented in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* as the philosophy of 'Unhu', under which Tambu was raised prior to colonial capitalist disruption. The principle of Unhu, as captured by Dangaremba is based on collectivity and reciprocity. Unhu is a principle that requires the participation of everyone for the purpose of elevating community preservation over egocentricity. To practice Unhu is to incorporate the concept of negotiation and renegotiation into everyday relational dynamics. In the novel, Tambu's understanding of the workings of Unhu comes after her futile effort to feel recognized and validated under the white supremacist school system. The nullification of her subjectivity and resulting disintegration of her sense of identity almost leads to her dismissal of Unhu as unpractical and impossible to achieve. After yet another denial of an academic trophy that rightfully belongs to her, she finally sees the inhumanity of the colonialist system for what it is and comes to the realization that the practice of Unhu is not a given and cannot function "unless the other person was practicing *unhu* also" (Dangarembga 119). Just like Tambu who is awarded a diversity scholarship to attend a racially segregated school that brings her nothing but cognitive dissonance, Effia's paradoxical condition of existing in the margin as a Native and in the center as a 'wench' is nothing but a class hoax instituted by white colonialist civilization. Like Tambu, her contradictory position of being elevated as an illegitimate wife whilst living in the shadow of enslaved Native women presents serious ideological complications. Similar to Tambu's action of dissociating from her culture and people, Effia and the privileged illegitimate wives deal with their contradictory situation by skirting around the discussion of the ongoing activities in the dungeon. Another way one of the Native wives confronts the margins of her Black womanhood is to assert their class difference from the unlucky women: "There are women down there who look like us, and our husbands must learn to tell the difference" (Gyasi 25). This discussion during their get-together stimulates Effia to think differently and expansively about the captured people, the racial and ethnic connection she shares with the women in the dungeon, and its implication on her own social classification.

While Effia's position as an illegitimate wife in comparison to Esi's enslaved status could definitely be interpreted as a class privilege that crosscuts her gender hierarchy, I argue that it is in actual fact a designed disenfranchised hierarchy, whose purpose is to accrue advantages to the dominant white men. Effia's and Tambu's contradictory conditions are brilliant representations of the margins of womanhood Black women exist in, which underscores the importance of a decolonial approach to untangling the kinds of oppression and privilege

found in previously colonized societies. This means that it is important to account for the "cultural implications of colonial domination" in the application of universalist categories such as class, sexuality, religion etc. to previously colonized societies (Aschcroft et al., 2000, 37). Hudson-Weems, in her meticulous inquiry into the crosscurrents of African liberation and gender trajectories, also articulates this groundbreaking sociopolitical epistemology—that a commitment to the centrality of African women's emancipation will always go together with relentlessly addressing the "life-threatening plight of all Africana people, both men and women, at the hands of a racist system," considering the long history of racial violence on African people and culture (2020, 23). Ultimately, what Hudson-Weems's theory of Africana womanism does is call for a conditional application of intersectionality to the discourse of social equality and justice. That while intersectionality's analytical framework of broadening and overlapping the scope of social and political identities is refreshing, the issue of racism for Black feminism must remain a priority, and not be conceived of as a trivial obstacle to be simultaneously addressed with other categories like gender, class, sexuality etc. This is because the fragments of subjugation faced by African women cannot be isolated from the "historical realities of hegemony and ethnocentrism by Western cultures and the accompanying atrocities of slavery, colonialism and oppression" (2). In light of the foregoing, I substantiate Hudson-Weems's theoretical insight by asking the sentiment often contemplated by a majority of Black and African scholars, whether the social dynamics of African societies would have evolved and adapted with its own narratives of modernity, without the reiterative disruption caused by epistemic legacies that have their origin in Eurocentric institutions.

3.3.2 Convoluted Postcolonial Normativities: Religion, Culture, and Gender Ideologies

This sub-chapter explores the intersections of religion, culture, and gender ideologies in relation to the characters' expression of agency and reinvention of self in *A Bit of Difference*, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Americanah*. In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola Bello, a Nigerian expatriate living and working as an auditor for an international charitable organization in London, remains unmarried at the age of thirty-nine. Jaiye, her younger sister refuses to kneel to greet her mother-in-law, nor does she participate in the capacity of a wife at family functions. Because of this rejection of her conjugal wife role, she does not impress her mother-in-law and the other conjugal wives. While her mother-

in-law, described as a "proper traditional woman who believes Yoruba culture is superior to all others", is of the opinion that Jaiye's career status should not eclipse her wife's role to her conjugal family, Jaiye's postcolonial ideology contrasts with this Yoruba worldview (Atta 145). It is important to clarify with Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's scholarship that the Yoruba world is not dichotomized into "clearly distinct male and female sectors", and 'wife' is only an identity that is lineage-membership bound rather than bio-anatomically conceived. A woman in Yoruba society can also occupy the position of a husband with "all its implications for social roles, access, and even questions of place and identity" (1997, 160).

Subu, Deola's friend, and vice president of an investment bank in the UK, is also unmarried. Although Subu and Deola do not agree on very much due to different ideological standpoints, their resistance to the pressure from their families in Nigeria about their unmarried status connects them. Despite their career accomplishments, their mothers who desperately want to see them married with children consider them deficient. Within this organizing principle, the ultimate identity for a woman is her identity as a wife. Every other identity is muted in comparison: "Subu could be the prime minister of England and her mother would still say, 'But she could be married with children'" (34). Similar to Subu and Deola, Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah* is confronted with pressure from her parents to marry, following her ostensible career success in the United States. Her announcement over the phone that she plans to move in with her boyfriend prompts their inquiry into her plan to marry. Furthermore, it is intimated that her decision to cohabit with a man goes unchallenged only because she lives in the US. It appears that the same standard used to judge women does not apply to men, promptly suggesting that marital status is gender specific. Importantly, these women in their own way alter the borders of their social conceptions for their individualities.

The gender ideology operating in this fictional postcolonial Nigerian society is represented as hierarchical, and women's position are subordinate to men. Not only is there a gender-differentiated conduct expected of boys and girls, there is an additional dichotomization of girls' behavior. Girls are placed into good versus bad binaries that guide their moral compass into adulthood. The good versus bad binary designates girls as mature, sexually repressive, and excellent wives and mothers in training or useless, decadent, promiscuous and defective as consequence of their morally reprehensible actions. For boys, no such dichotomy exists, and even when they fall inadequate of societal ethical

ideals, the ambivalence expressed towards them foretells the presence of a gender hierarchy. This binary is succinctly dramatized by Atta in *A Bit of Difference:*

> Nigerian boys carried on like little polygamists, juggling their serious girlfriends and chicks on the side. Well-brought-up Nigerian girls were essentially housewives-in-training. They dressed and behaved more mature than they were, cooked for their boyfriends and didn't party much. Useless girls slept around. A guy had to rape a girl before he was considered that useless and even then someone would still go out with him and attribute his reputation to rumour. There were rumours about cocaine habits, beatings and experimental buggery. The guys eventually got married (37).

Using flashback technique, the gendered training and expectations inculcated into Deola and Ifemelu is revealed in both *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*. Their childhoods in Nigeria are marked with restrictions from socializing with boys their age in order not to be conceived of as promiscuous. Deola's attempt to initiate social contact is forestalled by the boys' mothers, who regards her behavior as unbecoming of a girl. One mother tells her to wait until her boy child approaches her. Ultimately, she is considered a temptress for expressing sociability, demonstrating that girls are positively judged only by their conformity to the gendered organizing principle. Ifemelu is equally subjected to gendered teachings in the church. Girls are admonished to desist from wearing tight trousers to avoid "the sin of temptation", and mothers are portrayed as zealously handing over their daughters for improvement (Adichie 61). On the other hand, Lanre, Deola's elder brother in *A Bit of Difference* is given much more liberty for self-expression. He is at liberty to have girlfriends known to his parents. His mother is characterized as excitely taking messages for him without any disapproving remark. The same moral code that applies to Deola does not apply to him. For the lucky girlfriends, they are portrayed as staying with the boys despite their legendary sexual involvement with multiple girls. Their loyalty is considered a symbol of good future wife material. Lanre, for instance, eventually marries his childhood girlfriend Eno, who stayed committed to him despite his philandering, and Jaiye, Deola's younger sister, marries Funso, her boyfriend who had "several shows on the side" known to her (Atta 93).

In both *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*, a vivid impression of the gender socialization prevalent in postcolonial Nigeria is spotlighted through Deola's work travel and Ifemelu's relocation to Nigeria. The presence and ratification of cultural and religious diversity intimates a mix and sometimes clash between

surviving indigenous value-systems and colonial legacies. This is evident in the ethos of the institution of marriage, sexual behaviors and heteronormative compliances and subversions exhaustively characterized in the novels. In *A Bit of Difference*, Aunty Bisi, a chartered secretary and Deola's mother's younger sister, is romantically involved with a prominent married man. He is described as a Muslim with multiple wives. Aunty Bisi on the other hand is neither a Muslim nor interested in pursuing any form of legally binding relationship with any man. She has a son for her partner and is very satisfied with living in a separate apartment from him and his other wives. Her relationship dynamic is acknowledged and accepted by family and friends. Most significantly, her choice of lifestyle is associated with the era in which she was born. She is described as a "child of the sixties"[1] who smoothly vacillates between indigenous cultural values and colonial ideas and institutions. They got divorced whenever they wanted and did not conceive polygamy as inherently oppressive or empowering. Their choices are generously adjusted to the flexibility of either sides: "whatever permissiveness they were up to, they could easily say, but we're African. One man, one wife is colonial" (245). Ivie, a corporate relations director of a bank and Deola's cousin, is involved with a married senator, who for religious reasons cannot divorce his wife. He is described as a catholic, who got married because his faith dictates marriage as remedy to pregnancy outside wedlock. Nevertheless, him and his legally married wife live separately, and he continues to live with Ivie. Within the context of sexual behavior, single rich men are presumed to be gay, not because their moral worth rests on their identity as husbands, but because the pinnacle of women's aspiration ends with getting married. Ivie insinuates that Wale, a man Deola meets on her work trip to Abuja, might be gay simply because he is rich and unmarried: "He is single, owns a hotel and no one has snapped him up yet? Do you know how many single women there are in this place? This is not a matter of scarcity. Men like that don't exist. Or is he…" (111). Both middle class men and women are characterized as "sleeping around" for various reasons, but women are judged and shamed for their sexual freedom (114).

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu on her arrival to Nigeria is confronted with an effervescent culture of materialism marked by gender. The subject of marriage is a unifying and preferred topic among women. Being unmarried is

---

1   The sixties in Nigeria is considered to be the decolonization period. During this period, Nigeria gained independence and also severed its ties with Britain to become a republic (see https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/Independent-Nigeria).

met with pitiful comments like "don't worry, your own will come, just pray about it" (Adichie 490). In postcolonial Lagos, gendered socialization responds actively to the postcolonial capitalist system, in that the status of a woman is measured by the capital worth of her male partner, thereby reinforcing an already enmeshed hetero-patriarchal social order. Marriage becomes a means for women to climb the class ladder. Declaratives from Ifemelu's old friends like "you do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you". […] "He's into oil. His business card has Nigerian and international offices". […] "Her husband has major money. Her engagement ring is bigger than Zuma Rock", demonstrate how postcolonial capitalism intersects with gender socialization to subordinate women (477–492). The repercussion for women is that they are additionally dispossessed of financial autonomy and survive at the benevolence of their husbands. Not only women suffer the bad effects of this imperial capitalist system, teenage girls are also sexually exploited as experienced by Efe in *On Black Sisters' Street*. Charmed by the promise of a prosperous life, she succumbs to the pressure of a married man in her vicinity. After he impregnates and abandons her, her attempt to make him take financial responsibility for her child is matched with threats from his wife; threats that have been unleashed on six other women and their offsprings before Efe. The intimidation tactic employed by the married man's wife is simply a tool to preserve her and her children's class status and jealously guard her philandering husband's wealth from other women and their "bastard" children (Unigwe 71). According to her, her husband can be blamed neither for his indiscretions nor for his refusal to wear a condom. The women are at fault and must be viciously dismissed whenever they come knocking for a share of her husband's legacy.

In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola's visit to an NGO for widows in Abuja she is required to audit, presents interesting gendered trajectories. The female CEO of the NGO presupposes her marital status right at the beginning of the meeting. Not only that, the binary of good versus bad women also makes an appearance in the meeting. One of the NGO workers recounts to Deola that the death of the husbands is caused by HIV contracted from prostitutes. Placing the entire blame on the prostitutes, she insists that the budget allocated for the management of the HIV epidemic is unnecessary, and at best should be used only for the needs of the widowed wives, because "wives are not in the same category as prostitutes" (Atta 125). We also get a glimpse of the portrayal of women in Nollywood movies. In one of the movies viewed by Deola, the woman character is portrayed as a conniving wife and another as a wicked mother-in-law. Deola's

comment on the predictability of the plot conveys that this one-dimensional portrayal of women is a common Nollywood preoccupation. The significance of this observation is that women are stripped of their complexity and treated as a "homogeneous bio-anatomically determined group" (Oyěwùmí 1997, 10).

For Deola and Subu, who have transnational and diasporic identities, there is an even larger mutability to their identity, gender ideology and overall agential capacities that can only be captured with a nuanced theory like intersectionality. From the first few pages of the novel, we are introduced to two middle class female immigrants who hold different perspectives on their agency. While they are both characterized as self-assured, career-oriented, successful women who do not conform to the post-colonial Nigerian society on gendered marriage value, their gender ideology vis-a-vis systems of power they are delimited by influences their privileges and limitations in distinguishable ways. While Subu is described as a "born-again Christian" and a current member of an "American Pentecostal church in London", Deola is described as a "non-believer", who was raised around multiple religious traditions (31). This religious aspect of their identity contributes to a significant shift in their socialization into gendered identities and consequent self-determination. Unlike Deola who sees her sexual agency as something personal, not in any way subordinate to a man's, Subu's sexual agency is shaped by her Christian beliefs. She accedes to the Christian concept of virginity, attends single-women fellowships, and declares her body the temple of God. She also recommends abstinence as the way to combat the high rate of HIV infection. In *Americanah* and *On Black Sisters' Street* alike, the impact of monotheistic religious practices on women's agential capacities are reiterated through heterosexual social interactions.

Following Deola's work trip to Abuja, Nigeria, she directly expresses her sexual interest in Wale, a man she meets at the hotel she checks into. Despite her personal gender ideology with respect to her sexual freedom, the Islamic religious laws deployed in the Northern part of the country inhibits her agency. Deola verbalizes her apprehension over her performance of modesty and makes effort to repress her sexual interest due to the Islamic "Sharia law" observed in that region of Nigeria (132). Her comment "it's me they are watching, not you" spotlights the significance that the practice of monotheistic religions has on the construction and maintenance of gender asymmetry (132). Under this law, women's bodies through their sexuality are fabricated as sites of control. Deola's casual anecdote that a contracted beauty pageant was preempted with riots and women could be sentenced to death for fornication offers a glimpse of the limitations that women are subjected to. Wale's

persuasion that "things are not that bad" represents a textbook debate on male privilege that has characterized feminist discourse (133). Following this exchange and Deola's shift in sexual expression as soon as she changes location from Lagos to Abuja, it is indisputable that there is a huge difference in the social organization of Lagos and Abuja in the aspect of gender socialization. We see a Islamic-informed constitutional law imposed on women's sexuality that is absent in religiously and culturally diverse Lagos. This however does not mean that Christian religious practices do not in any way crosscut gender socializations in Lagos, as with other parts of the country.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the value ascribed to the virginity of girls in the Christian faith makes an appearance. Ama's mother, who lives in Enugu, is modelled as a symbol of purity to the congregation by her pastor-husband. Ama is also expected to follow in her mother's footsteps and "become a model wife for a good Christian man some day" (Unigwe 131). In *Americanah*, there is an instance of a bridal train being forbidden from entering into the Catholic Church in Lagos, because of their "indecent" dresses (Adichie 477). Another bride is described as "a true woman of virtue" during her wedding ceremony (565). Women are charged with preserving the success of the marriage, and consequently blamed for a possible failure. Christian gendered logic also shows up in Obinze's relationship with his wife Kosi despite his own non-conforming viewpoint on marriage. Kosi, described as an ardent churchgoer, prohibits her single friends from visiting her matrimonial home immediately after her marriage to Obinze. When her house help confesses to her about her previous sexual harassment by male employers, Kosi blames her for the men's behavior and immediately sends her packing. Moreover, in her sexual relationship with Obinze, she prioritizes his satisfaction over her own. Obinze imagines that it must be her "pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband, even if she didn't feel like it, otherwise the husband would find solace in a Jezebel" (569). In Ifemelu's case, her individualized security and freedom is temporarily lost in the gendered articulations she encounters upon her return to Nigeria. She soon realizes that women's marital status is enmeshed with employment conditions and overall perception of conviviality. Due to her efficient work ethics, her receptionist diagnoses her with "the spirit of husband-repelling" and invites her to church for deliverance: "You are too hard, ma, you will not find a husband. But my pastor can destroy that spirit" (517). Even though she breaks up with her boyfriend prior to her relocation, the system impacts her psyche so greatly that she finds herself lying to her parents

and old friends that he plans to join her in Lagos soon, after which they plan to get married.

Accordingly, even though Deola and Ifemelu's gender ideologies affirm feminist values, their agential capacities fluctuate according to the systemic power that is present in the spaces they inhabit. This is because structural and ideological power play a crucial role in shaping privileges and limitations. Examining Deola and Ifemelu's journeys from London to the United States, then to Lagos and Abuja, reveal the fluidity of their agency—a fictional portrayal of intersectionality that highlights the multiple layers of marginalization Black women face in their everyday lives. The fact that Deola and Ifemelu's sense of being do not significantly overturn the systems of power present in these spaces, demonstrate that freedom can only be partially attained through individual autonomy. True freedom for intersecting marginalized identities rests in the identification and dismantling of the gendered, religious, and cultural systems of power and oppression.

3.3.3 Postcolonial Modernity, Class Mobilizations, and Agency

Although the women's agential capacities as they are shaped by social class have been implicitly explored in the form of heightened class identification through material embodiment in intimate relationships for instance, class still merits explicit exploration for the main reason that gender, race, and class taken together in the context of postcolonial modernity are sites for copious negotiable difference of inequalities. From the very first page of Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and Adichie's *Americanah*, Deola and Ifemelu can be identified as belonging to a privileged, professional class of mobile female Africans in the Black diaspora. This is in stark contrast to Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, which opens with a noticeable transition of the protagonist's class position from deprivation to a "brand-new wealth" (Unigwe 1).

In *A Bit of Difference*, at least at first glance, the airport scene, with Deola arriving to Atlanta in the US from London, conveys a certain form of accessibility and effortless border crossing. At the immigration where passengers' pictures and fingerprints are collected, an Irish man criticizes the airport's surveillance protocol as a "load of bollocks" (Atta 1). Deola's musing that the man's verbal outrage on camera despite his visible "skull tattoos" (1) is only safe because he is white simultaneously conveys Deola's alertness to how social identities interact to affect one's life. The second chapter, which recounts her return to London, is also tinged with anecdotes of her racial subjugation at immigration.

Despite the leading depiction of Deola's class privilege as a mobile African, she is very aware of the reciprocity between her positionality and agential capacity. At work, she "plays up her English accent – speaking phonetics, as Nigerians call it – so that people might not assume she lacks intelligence" (Atta 21). She understands that her diasporic social status is one of second-class as consequence of her race. After her return to London from Atlanta, the third chapter is introduced with another work trip to Nigeria, her home country. The work trip also doubles as her father's five years memorial service. In this chapter, the reader meets her family and forms deeper opinion on her intersecting agential shifts and class status. The airport scene in the Lagos airport is without any striking symbolic racial classification that assigns a second-class status to her. There is also an absence of surveillance measure at the airport, as well as an immediate openness and liberation to Deola's disposition. She hurries through the airport to meet her mother, who is waiting with her driver. The description of the airport, as well as the street of Lagos as they drive home is detailed with distinguishing spatial information that further prepares the reader for the revelation of Deola's class status in Nigeria. At the airport, the moving walkway, escalator, and air conditioner are in states of disrepair. The roads of Lagos are described as "full of potholes", the streets are "waterlogged" and occupied with "unfinished buildings and broken-down cars" (72). Deola's mother's response "nothing works" to Deola's question about the streetlights conveys a deteriorating condition of the city. Simultaneously, her additional proclamation of God's auspices "in a tone that approximates smugness" conveys the idea that their family is at least above the degenerating squalor of the city (73). These two decrepit spatial frames of the airport and Lagos streets all flow into a jarring contrast of the spatial frame of Deola's parents' colonial style house, which is described as a building built before independence and is located in Ikoyi, a low-risk and upper-class part of the city. Particularly relevant is the spatial extension of the hyper-transmitted arrangement of the Sunday newspapers on the dining table with displays of unprejudiced and balanced headlines, which is in stark contrast to the parochial Western news report about Nigeria Deola is accustomed to in the UK.

As the protagonist reorients herself to home, we finally get to meet her family, relatives, and friends—her mother, the family matriarch, her elder brother Lanre, a director at their late father's bank, and her younger sister Jaiye, a medical doctor. They are described as the "Ikoyi crowd" who have access to "the best Nigeria can offer, the best education and professional training the world over" (86). They own houses abroad and fly to various countries regularly for

family holidays. This group of people are known for their financial and po-
litical power and are simultaneously resented and revered for their tremen-
dous wealth, power, and privileges in Nigeria. Their wealth, power and priv-
ileges are amassed through their connection to newly vacant colonial politi-
cal positions, oil and gas industries, telecommunications, banking industries,
churches, non-governmental organizations, and government-backed privati-
zation initiatives that prioritize profit over citizenry welfare. This class system,
according to so many scholars on colonialism and its legacies, is tied to the
colonial capitalist patriarchal systems of power introduced into the colonies.
In the wake of this (post)colonial system that is built to disadvantage African
people, the class of the *Nouveau riche* is created, and critics of the system are
considered to be moralists who only complain because they "have not had an
opportunity to be corrupt" (88). It is this class of *Nouveau riche* that Deola's late
father belongs to. Prior to his wealth acquisition via foreign exchange deals and
banking privatization, he belonged to a lower social class, with poor illiterate
parents who managed to send him abroad to study for an accountant degree.
In this postcolonial capitalist Nigeria as represented in the novel, laws are op-
tional and upward social mobility is only possible through assimilation into the
colonial model of a capitalist system that centers individualistic accumulation
of wealth to the detriment of community. According to him, "This is business.
There is no such thing as clean money" in Nigeria (89).

     In this postcolonial Nigeria, we see certain gendered privileges that accrue
to women through their belonging to the class of the *Nouveau riche*, or the "most
patriarchalized class", even as they are doubly subordinated under the colonial
capitalist patriarchal systems of power (Oyěwùmí 1997, 155). Despite the fact
that Deola is subordinately placed in relation to men, her *Nouveau riche* belong-
ing in Nigeria, together with her affiliation with Western institutions, accrues
to her certain authority in Nigeria. On her work assignments to one of the
NGOs in Nigeria, she is met with an unusual acrimonious attitude from the
male head, who has a PhD in public health. She nevertheless decides to give
him a chance due to her seasoned discovery that her perception of acrimony is
most often just nerves on the part of the inspected bodies. In the course of her
inspection, the man's perceived hostility turns into apprehension at the inti-
mation that he might have committed some faux pas, confirming her estima-
tion. In Deola's mindfulness about who is and is not the "vulnerable party" is
a recognition of the class hierarchy that intersects with the gender hierarchy
both are subjected to (Atta 100). Deola's sum of childhood to adulthood experi-
ences and lifestyle is crosscut with her belonging to an upper class.

From attending a boarding school in Nigeria to transferring to the United Kingdom for the rest of her education, we see a gendered life sheltered in contemporary socioeconomic advantages. While her experiences in the United Kingdom evince manifestations of racism and misogynoir; like the career adviser who alluded to African people's unintelligent nature, or the boys who did not consider her sexually attractive as a result of her black femaleness, her erstwhile upward mobility into the intersecting social categories of whiteness and upper, dominant classes is on the basis of her father's capital control. Her siblings who have not spent as much time abroad, however, scorn the idea that they are or could be subjugated on the basis of race. As long as they belong to the upper echelon and reside in Nigeria, they are shielded from the condition of anti-Blackness, which is the specific kind of racial bigotry directed towards Black people on the global stage. It would appear that her father is aware of the systemic racism targeted towards people of African descent. His attempt at persuading her to stay back in Nigeria is supported by the sentiment that she would "never rise to the top as an African overseas" (121). Her siblings' unawareness of racially motivated constraints, together with her father's assessment, enunciates Deola's implication in class hierarchy in Nigeria. Deola's father's conviction also underscores how the colonial process was established on the hierarchical classification of the colonizer and Native (see Oyěwùmí 1997, 2016).

If belonging to the *Nouveau riche* class equals upward mobility into upper-class lifestyle and this system is tied to the colonial capitalist patriarchal systems of power introduced into the colonies, it is not surprising that women are very much aware of their alienation from the public sphere, and in response produce new socio-economic groupings within this heteronormative patriarchal economic power matrix. Deola's mother, the family matriarch, was a nurse in England who moved up in status through her marriage and gave up her nursing career to become a homemaker upon their relocation to Nigeria. She occupies a privileged class position as a homemaker and a widow with inheritances in fame and properties acquired from her late husband. As a homemaker, even before her husband's death, she wielded a controlling influence in the home front, which her children together with her husband defaults to. Deola considers her mother fortunate to be in this position and at the same time holds a deep admiration for her execution of her side of the binary. It appears that the *Nouveau riche* wives, as evidenced by the protagonist's mother and her close friends, are juxtaposed against other women and wives of the common class, wherefore they pride themselves on their refinement, culture, and propriety.

Deola's mother's homemaker job includes "to have food on the table, to be well groomed at all times and ready to play hostess" amongst many others (261).

Deola's mother's *Nouveau riche* close female friends and network of acquaintances, who we get to meet during her husband's five years memorial service, articulate the reality of the intersection of imperial gender and class binaries. Her close female friends are referenced as "Nigerian Tories" and depicted as either daughters or wives of affluent men, who come by their own upper-class status through their harmony with the heteronormative patriarchal economic power structures (162). They, through their harmony with the imperial system and foreign powers, have carved a position for themselves in Nigeria, where they are called Madam, treated with respect, and bequeath "their sense of entitlement to their children through estates" (162). Similar to her close female friends, her network of acquaintances are wives of expatriates who can afford to leave Nigeria to spend their retirement years in London, Hong Kong, Milan etc. On one occasion, Deola overhears her mother declaring her friend "self-made woman" for her political appointment as an ambassador, through her romantic involvement with several wealthy and powerful men (165). It is clear that a self-made woman in postcolonial Nigeria, as represented in the novel, is the ability of a woman to comply with the heteronormative patriarchal binary in order to accumulate capital and status for themselves. This shrewdness of character is made manifest in the women's awareness of and silence about their men's notorious lifestyle. For instance, it is intimated that one of her *Nouveau riche* close friends is aware that her younger sister was being molested by her husband yet did nothing until he finally dispossessed her of her wife status and married the younger sister. Also, when Deola, who ends up getting pregnant from a casual sex affair, introduces the man as the illegitimate son of a Lagos renowned lawyer, her mother's weary response "These men. Skeletons. Skeletons" conveys her awareness and resignation (259). According to Deola's matriarchal mother, a woman who wants to reap the benefits of the heteronormative patriarchal economic systems of power must not rebel against the system. Rather, she must be content with her place in the binary and use it as advantage to gain agency: "You don't give a man the impression he is not needed. I know you are very capable of doing just that and thinking you are a clever clogs" (257). Deola, herself, very much aware of the implication of belonging to an upper-class hierarchy is grateful for the privileges of the postcolonial capitalist patriarchal system of power, and never turns down financial support from her father's estate for the advancement of her agency against the grain of normative whiteness and maleness.

Despite the replication of colonial patriarchal capitalist system in fictional postcolonial Nigeria, there is of marked interest a discernible modification to the class system, which can be traced to internal cultural particularities. We see a remarkable expression of acquiescence to ethnic sociology and community relations by Deola's mother, even as she affirms her own Eurocentric-informed *Nouveau riche* class identification. After her youngest daughter rebels against the marriage value-system and evicts her adulterous husband from their matrimonial home, she refuses to take her daughter's side against her in-laws due to ethnic sensibilities. She continues to maintain correspondence with them and contends that she is doing it in the interest of the grandchildren that binds both families together. Jaiye's mother-in-law, depicted as a traditional Yoruba woman and the senior wife of a Chief, is highly respected in her clan. In Yoruba society, chieftaincy institution was an indigenous political power structure prior to colonialism, which underwent modifications in the colonial context, but was still central to the colonial agenda and postcolonial systems of power (Falola & Genova 2006). Deola's mother's reasoning that Jaiye's mother-in-law "may not be modern in her thinking", but that Jaiye should neither insult her nor prevent her from seeing her own grandchildren to avoid inauspicious consequence, conveys her deference to the intersection of Yoruba's social hierarchy (Atta 257).

Jaiye's mother-in-law's status as a senior wife of the royal clan, entitled with legitimacy outside of colonial gender and heteronormative class binaries, also disrupts the premise of a ubiquitous subjugation of women. This enunciates Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's theorization of the Yoruba society as predicated on seniority rather gender. According to Oyěwùmí, seniority, which is the "social ranking of persons based on their chronological ages" is the "cornerstone of social intercourse" and is explicit in Yoruba linguistics (1997, 40–41). This hierarchy based on seniority is also evident in specific social institutions like marriage. For instance, wives who marry into a conjugal family are ranked by order or timing of marriage into the clan. Worthy of note additionally is that the ranking of a wife "within the lineage is independent of the rank of her conjugal partner" (45). Jaiye's mother-in-law's rank as the senior wife of the royal lineage bestows her with certain privileges reserved for that rank. The members of the lineage without exception, including their conjugal partners, address her as "Mama mi" and "must stoop, avert their eyes" when greeting her (Atta 145). Respect is an important aspect of Yoruba tradition, and it is for this refusal to show deference to the lineage hierarchies that Jaiye is resented. Although Oyěwùmí goes into a comprehensive exposition of gender-framed de-

bates in the context of the Yoruba world sense and the shifting roles and locations of women within relationships, she has also pointed out that these social categories cannot be accurately and sufficiently translated into Western epistemology without subjecting them to degrees of distortion. Most importantly however to take away from Oyěwùmí's theorization is that power in the Yoruba society "was located in a multiplicity of sites, as well as tied to social role-identities that were multiple and shifting for each individual depending on the situation" (1997, 49). Against this background, Jaiye's mother-in-law's empowered identity and agency, even as she is a woman and a wife, becomes easy to comprehend and deconstruct.

Ultimately, Deola's identity and agency becomes fully realized only with her relocation to Nigeria. Discontented with her NGO's policy on Africa, together with their dismissal of her informed mediation for self-sufficiency over charity, she considers quitting her job. Her work life in the UK is suffused with invisibility. The social world of Nigeria continues to be interpreted through Western ideologies. African peoples' sensibilities in Nigeria and the diaspora are shaped through colonial economic practices like charity. Dara, a spokesperson of Africa Beat, one of LINK's charity programs in Nigeria, is disengaged with because of his view favoring polygamy. Deola reasons that there is an accommodation for religious conventions under customary law in Nigeria, to which her boss counters that it is unlawful in the West, whether practiced as part of the religion or not. Dara's perspective is regarded as sexist, and it is for this singular dissimilarity that he is re-considered as the Nigerian face of their charity work. It is not lost on Deola that Dara, a college dropout whose views would have provoked indifference in Nigeria, is made into an ambassador for affairs pertaining to Africa. He is a prop for coloniality, disposed of the instant his view divaricates with hegemonic Western particularities. Even though Deola is entrusted with auditing two NGOs in Nigeria, her recommendations are disregarded. Driven by a progressive feeling of discontent over the prevalent institutional anti-Black racism and misogyny, she questions the point of her job assignment, and contemplates on the reason for her hiring – if it is only because "she is Nigerian – a Nigerian to match Dara" (217). A positive pregnant test catalyzes further contemplation about her expatriate life, and she makes the final decision that returning to Nigeria might be the best decision for her.

In *Americanah*, with Ifemelu's voluntary migration to the US comes an immersion into the pre-existing US social order and a subsequent modification of her social class. Events leading up to her migration highlights her class belonging in Nigeria as middle class. Like Deola, her social class in Nigeria is pred-

icated upon her parents' class belonging. But unlike Deola, Ifemelu's parents belong to middle working-class category—a category occupied by teachers and civil servants who earn meagre incomes for their jobs. Her father, a civil servant with twelve years of service at the federal agency is unconscionably disemployed because of his refusal to call his new boss mummy. Living on his wife's vice-principal salary in his subsequent difficulty to get another job does not bode well for the entire family. Ifemelu is only able to attend and complete her high school education at one of the exclusive high schools reserved for children of upper-class by virtue of her own excellence and her father's drudgery: "She would not be here if she had not done so well on the entrance examination, if her father had not been determined that she would go to "a school that builds both character and career" (Adichie 80). Her school becomes a conduit for her to associate with the upper-class children, who traverse affluent lives in Nigeria, England, and US.

In this fictional postcolonial capitalist Nigeria, gender and class taken together with the cultural economy, produce complex arrays of social and economic formations and dynamics that both conform to and conflict with imperial heteronormative patriarchal capitalist structures of power. The new female boss's mandate to be called mummy as a show of respect, and Ifemelu's dad's blatant refusal is one of such emergent dynamics that suggests the manifestation of a shifting gender and class interests that albeit reproduces imperial patriarchal capitalist relational power dynamics. Ifemelu's mother on the flip side sees things differently from her husband, irritably advancing that saving his job should have been a priority even if he had to "call somebody Mummy" (57). His refusal to engage in these structural relations combined with her displeasure is profoundly significant for interpreting class within the shifting dynamics of gender and taken-for-granted universality of male dominace. Concurrently, another incident at the University where a male professor publicly slaps Obinze's mother for talking to him in the manner unbefitting of a woman evinces a co-constitutive gender and class interest that points to the replication of colonial gender binary values at workplace. In the aftermath of this altercation and Obinze's mother's crusading for punitive action, the student union's involvement that she should not have been subjected to that form of dehumanization only because she is a widow further escalates and infuriates her. Their mobilization around her because "she doesn't have a husband to speak for her" and not because "she is a full human being" reproduces a discourse of female victimhood in the service of imperial male dominance, which is doubly marginalizing (71). This leap of deconstruction further enunciates the preva-

lent colonial heteronormative patriarchal systems of power in both private and public spaces. Taken together, these two concurrent events point to the epistemic reality of a gender hierarchy that drive the actions and reactions of people within the shifting dynamics of their socio-political identities.

Another notorious dynamic to class mobilizations is an abiding endorsement of whiteness and white supremacy. This mobilization around imperial white supremacy underscores an ontological hierarchy that places European civilization and proximity to it on top of the hierarchy and frames Blackness and Black civilization, according to Frantz Fanon as "a corporeal malediction" (2008, 84). In his famous book *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon explains this colonial ontological situation as an effect of a colonial racism that was created by the Europeans to subjugate colonized people rigorously from the internal. To do this, the inferiority of Blackness is established in reference to whiteness, creating a behavior of dependency on European civilization for ontological security in the colonized Black person. Fast forward to the end of the novel, with Ifemelu's return to Nigeria, there is a recognizable change to her class, which in turn positively impacts her agential capacity. Unlike Deola whose inclusion and access in the UK is bolstered by her family's upper-class belonging in Nigeria, Ifemelu's class status in the US is elevated by her own professional achievements, which is made accessible to her through a university scholarship. Upon her return to Nigeria, there is a visible elevation to her class status that is missing prior to her migration to the US.

At her new job, where she works as the feature editor, her flamboyant employer is eager to remark on the foreignness and Western education of majority of her employees. One of her colleagues is also quick to introduce her alma mater to Ifemelu, "as though to establish right away that they were members of the same superior club" (Adichie 496). Ifemelu ultimately realizes that the magazine replicates foreign magazine pieces and preoccupations, like writing a recipe for broccoli soup, which is non-existent in Nigeria. Ifemelu soon joins a Nigerpolitan Club exclusively for returnees from the US and England, which also enacts Fanon's social psychology of colonialism, whereupon colonized people internalize their own inferiority and replicate the oppressive racializing structures (2008). The returnees are narrated as immersed in polished sureness about their identities and place in the world that is strongly defined by their proximity to whiteness or westernization. Their accents are laced in foreignness, and their introductions eager to reference Western affiliations and system: "I lived in Boston until last year, he said in a falsely low-key way, because 'Boston' was code for Harvard (otherwise he

would say MIT or Tufts or anywhere else), just as another woman said, 'I was in New Haven', in that coy manner that pretended not to be coy, which meant that she had been at Yale" (502). While one might be tempted to argue that this is an inescapable case of hybridity borne out of migrating and transnational circumstances, the subjects of discussion, their interchange of smugness and elevation of Western civilization suggests a racializing arrangement. The exclusivity of the Nigerpolitan Club is not only to serve their commonality, but also to spotlight their intellectual superiority from Native Nigerians. What is of special relevance is the connecting thread of imperial white supremacist patriarchy in the duality of Ifemelu's class status and contingent agency. Her negation in the US and elevation in Nigeria exemplifies Fanon's theory of the "*Weltanschauung* of a colonized people" as thwarted by the imposition of a racist structure that objects to the Natives' civilization and frames Blackness in relation to whiteness (Fanon 2008, 82).

In the US, the social hierarchy is more convoluted with the presence of race, nationalities, and ethnicities. One distinguishing way Adichie engages with these social realities independently, and as they intersect with issues of gender is by infusing objective blog writing into the narrative and constructing Ifemelu as a blogger in addition to her fictive character. In fact, the blog is a prominent non-fictive part of the novel, which has stimulated a few essays. These essays focused on dissecting its contribution to the overall fictive genre have rightly centered the blog's exploration of race definitions, dynamics, and politics in the US, given that the blog posts are unequivocally centered on racial discourses and anecdotes. Serena Guarracino's and Felix Mutunga Ndaka's separate essays are two of such essays that have addressed the blog posts as an interruptive genre installed by Adichie to liberate her exploration of racial grievances from the convention of narratology. Their essay titles, "Writing so raw and true: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" and "Rupturing the Genre: Un-Writing Silence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" are paradigmatic in respect to these preoccupations. Serena Gurracino deconstructs the blog as an empowering meta-narrative device used for the purpose of bearing witness on the subject of Ifemelu's "racial self-awareness" to an involved audience, apropos allowing for a reflection on "writing as a collaborative art form in the digital age" (2014, 16). Felix Mutunga Ndaka on the other hand engages the blog entries as an "unpoliced" interactive space used for the purpose of building the text's concerns with "racism and its pathologies", together with the traumas induced by the presence of these racial hierarchies in the American society (2017, 115–116).

By way of alternative, I read the blogposts as a repository of self-referential anecdotes and followership engagement that is concerned with gendered legibility in a hierarchical convoluted space where race equaling class provokes dire discursive conditions for Black women. It is no coincidence that the blog only begins after she breaks up with her upper class white privileged boyfriend, Curt. If for nothing else, the racial-gendered overt and covert conflicts leading up to the break-up is a foreshadow of the blog's pre-occupation. In the first blog post, which appears in the main body of the narration titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Hispanic Means", Ifemelu blogs on the intersection of ethnicity, race and class in the American context using Aunt Uju's babysitter, who is Hispanic as illustration. She explains that before her arrival to the US, she would have categorized her as white, but in the US, she learns that Hispanic means a category of Spanish-speaking people who are not from Spain. Hispanic is the:

> chocolate-skinned woman from Peru, Hispanic means the indigenous people of Mexico. Hispanic means the paler folks from Puerto Rico. Hispanic also means the blond, blue-eyed guy from Argentina." The translation of their ethnicity to class classification places Hispanic people as "the frequent companions of American Blacks in poverty rankings", but still a "step above American Blacks in the American race ladder (Adichie 129).

What this blogpost does is introduce the reader to the nuances intimate with power structures, the centrality of race to class dynamics, at the same time, establishing the pathology of anti-Blackness. In another blog post, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What do WASPs Aspire To?", Ifemelu elaborates on the negation of Blackness in the historical genealogy of white supremacy and how every oppressed group think they are at least still better off than Black people are. So even in their critique of their struggles, the relief at not being positioned outside the realms of humanity and disdain for Black people exposes the "conflicted longing for WASP whiteness or, more accurately, for the privileges of WASP whiteness" [white Anglo-Saxon Protestants] (254). She gives a self-referential story about her aunt's disrespectful cleaner, a "coffee-skinned, black-haired and Spanish speaking woman", who her aunt speculates is being disrespectful because of established race relations. Her aunt's comment "Stupid woman, she thinks she is white" captures the awareness of Black women to their own double negation as woman and Black. Capturing the centrality of race to class lays the foundation for how this interconnectedness

complicates the agency of Black women in a white and male-dominated society. Ifemelu elaborates on this in a blogpost, "Sometimes in America, Race Is Class", where a carpet cleaner first treats her with hostility upon his assumption that she is a homeowner and needs his cleaning service. He only becomes pleasant upon the realization that she is a babysitter, and the real owner is a white woman. What is made obvious to the reader is the self-referential element of the blog entries. There is a back and forth from fiction to blog that appears to take place and anecdotes from Ifemelu's young, impressionable past occurs frequently to corroborate these concepts addressed in her blog. With this self-referential element made evident, the reader has no choice but read the diagnostic blog entries alongside the larger narrative of racial and gendered subtleties that play out in Ifemelu's life.

Ifemelu's unsatisfying relationship with Curt, which partially facilitates the genesis of the blog, aptly articulates these subtleties. On many occasions, she is denied services available to white women because of her race. These services are only made available to her as soon as Curt establishes her relationship to him. On one occasion, she is refused eyebrow waxing on the excuse that they do not do curly hair only until Curt intervenes and threatens to shut down the salon. Also, every time Curt introduces her as his girlfriend to friends, they all share a relatedness in their expression of surprise.

> It was not merely because Curt was white, it was the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money. If he were fat, older, poor, plain, eccentric, or dreadlocked, then it would be less remarkable, and the guardians of the tribe would be mollified. And it did not help that although she might be a pretty black girl, she was not the kind of black that they could with an effort, imagine him with: she was not light-skinned, she was not biracial (362).

There is an evident elevation to her class, which is only extended to her because of her connection to a white man. Therefore, despite her belonging to a privileged professional class of mobile female Africans, her agential capacity as a Black woman in the US is strongly impacted by the intersections of anti-Blackness, race, and class. This racial-gendered subtlety is theorized in a blog post, "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women—Both American and Non-American—Love Barack Obama". Here, she blogs about the layered marginality of Black women in white-male-dominant capitalist system, in which class as an effect of race

means an unmitigated denial of privilege in any form to Black women. She claims that American Black men, as beneficiaries of male hegemony are not exempted from these hierarchical pathologies. They, very much aware of the workings of capital accumulation, and how social capital greatly impacts human capital, do not like to pursue romantic relationships with Black women. They prefer to have "white wives" and if at all they go for Black women, they like them "to have some exotic quota, like half-Chinese or a splash of Cherokee. They like their women light. But beware what American Blacks consider 'light'. Some of these 'light' people, in countries of Non-American Blacks, would simply be called white (265). Moreover, it is because Barack Obama, a successful Black male public figure, has a Black wife that Black American and Non-American women share a great connection with and admiration for him. This is in line with Fanon's psychoanalytic inquisition into the historical pathologizing of Blackness, and how the Black man elevates himself to the white man's level by marrying a woman "in the range of colors to which he attributes a kind of hierarchy" (2008, 60). In these blog entries, Adichie buttresses Fanon's psychoanalysis discourse on the internal world of Black people as impacted by racism and how Black people enslaved by their own inferiority, emulate whiteness as the route to emancipation.

These constellations of racial-gendered insights reflected upon in her blog may partially account for the discontentment befouling Ifemelu's successful life, described in the first few pages of the novel, where the reader encounters her on the way to get her hair braided in preparation for her relocation to Nigeria. Here, we find out that she has a fellowship at Princeton, a love-filled relationship, and her blog, which she opens halfway into the novel is doing so well and generating income "with thousands of unique visitors each month" (Adichie 7). Yet, she feels a deep sense of bleakness and longings for "imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness" (7). Only by leaving behind everything she has worked for, including her relationship, and moving to Nigeria, where she describes as the only place she believes she can "sink her roots without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil", does she come alive (7).

By arming the protagonist, a first-generation African female migrant with this sensational therapeutic interactive chamber, Adichie is able to reconstruct her marginalized protagonist as an empowered blogger character with incisive observations about the often glossed-over racial-gendered subtleties that linger in its discomfort to American white people, as it is instructive to Africans on the continent. One way she does this is by magnifying Ifemelu's 'Non-Amer-

ican Black' blogging positionality, and implanting seeds of emotional distance between her and these US polarizing issues that might not be possible for an American Black blogger. I read this emotional distance as a purposeful element that allows for an echo of her voice in a space that hates to listen to Black women, loves to set them as rivals by deploying the good versus bad binaries, and uses their emotion about their oppression to deny them the episteme of objectivity. Ifemelu makes for a good cultural critique because she uses her group belonging and allyship responsibly even prior to her life as a blogger. She rebuffs an attempt made by the sister of her white employer to award her the good Black woman label because of her Non-American Black positionality, referencing American Black women's emotional pain and subjectivity as an effect of their dissimilar racial and gendered struggles and not a cause. Indeed, this cinches her as an irreverent character who can be trusted with delivering blunt and honest reflections on a range of topics that all tie to revealing and engaging the insidious nature of white privilege, as indicated by her blog title "*Raceteenth or various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (Adichie 4).

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the reader is introduced to a protagonist from a lower-class disadvantaged status, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the intersections of privilege, disadvantage, and agential capacities as shaped by structures of power. This is in contrast to Atta and Adichie's upper and middle privileged, professional class protagonists. From the first page, Unigwe uses repetition to imprint the class status of the character in the mind of the readers, axiomatically emphasizing the significance of class on the character's agency in the entire text. The phrases "money", "house", "new", "life", "wealth" are repeated a few times in the first two pages to emphasize this transition to abundance. When the reader meets Sisi, the protagonist, she just recently underwent a transition from an undisclosed previous life to a new life of affluence. While the condition of her previous life is still concealed from the reader, it would seem that Unigwe certainly wants the reader to know that Sisi's new affluent life is the outcome of a recent disassociation: "She hadn't abandoned them. Had she? She had just moved on. Surely, surely, she had that right. Still, she wondered: What were they doing now? When would they notice she was gone?" (Unigwe 2). As soon as this is established, the narrative immediately moves to another house on *Zwartezusterstraat*, where the subjects of Sisi's contemplations—Ama, Joyce and Efe—are hurriedly preparing for work. It is in this sequence of events that the reader finds out that the protagonist prior to her disassociation was an indentured sex worker, who was working

excessively to buy her freedom so she could begin to live the kind of life that she had always dreamed for herself.

In contrast to Deola and Ifemelu, who we meet undertaking various tasks that suggests effortless migrant mobility, the rushed exchanges amongst Ama, Joyce and Efe, coupled with the concern for the implication of Sisi's absence suggests a life condemned to servitude. As the plot progresses, the reader discovers that the women are entangled in a global commercial sex trafficking industry. Their sponsorship to Belgium is at a cost of thirty thousand euro, which they must pay back in instalments before they can be emancipated. Yet, there is a sincere gratitude displayed by the women, except for Joyce, who the reader later discovers, has an entirely different migration story and entry into the sex industry. Using flashbacks to their childhood to intrude upon the narrative of their life in Belgium, the socioeconomic status of the three women, Sisi, Efe and Ama, and impact on their agencies prior to their migration is magnified. By interspersing the narrative of their current lives with flashbacks of their pre-migratory lives, Unigwe flawlessly narrativizes the discourse of systemic violence and power imbalance as the causal effect of Black women's oppression as opposed to personal failure on their part. One way she is able to deliver this is by engaging with the family unit as the most significant social unit within the social structure that has a major impact on racial-gendered agential capacities.

In the flashback to Sisi's pre-migratory life, Unigwe amplifies the socioeconomic status of Sisi's parents, and the burden that is placed on Sisi from childhood to alter the impoverished condition of the family. Sisi's father's is described as an enduring believer in the power of education to improve one's socioeconomic status, and it is for this reason that he tries his possible best to give her the opportunity that was denied him. His own education ends abruptly at secondary school as a result of his parents' impoverished status, and he had to get a job with the little education he already had to assume responsibility for his nine younger siblings: "We have trained you, now it's your turn to train the rest. Take your nine siblings off our hands. It's time for us to reap the benefit of having a grown-up son!" (19). Sisi's father cannot help fantasizing about the possibility of a successful upper-class life and therefore harbors resentment towards the condition of his parent's destitution that effected a negative change to the trajectory of his life. Yet, he also passes down the same obligation to his daughter, demonstrating that Sisi's disadvantaged life just like her father's is predetermined by an inequitable social structure, which has culminated in the creation of a cycle of defeatist survival and predetermined obligation. Supporting Sisi up to the university level is also in service to their longing and effort to

alter their challenging socioeconomic condition. Sisi's anticipated class transcendence becomes a transition for them and:

> their one-way ticket out of the cramped two-room flat to more elegant surroundings. For in addition to the car, Chisom was expected to also have a house with room enough for her parents. A bedroom for them. A bedroom for herself. A sitting room with a large coloured TV. A kitchen with an electric cooker. And cupboards for all the pots and pans and plates they would need. No more storing pots under the bed! A kitchen painted lavender or beige. A soft, subtle colour that would make them forget this Ogba kitchen that was black with the smoke of many kerosene fires. A generator. No longer at the mercy of NEPA. A gateman. A steward. A high gate with heavy locks. A fence with jagged pieces of bottle sticking from it to deter even the most hardened thieves. A garden with flowers. no. not flowers. A garden with vegetables. Why have a garden with nothing you can eat' but flowers are beautiful. Spinach is beautiful too. Tomatoes are beautiful. OK. A garden with flowers and food. OK. Good. They laughed and dreamed, spurred on by Chisom's grades which, while not excellent, were good enough to encourage their dreams (20–21).

Their confidence in the prosperity of their daughter is however not random. It is emboldened by a soothsayer who predicted an auspicious future for Sisi on the eve of her birth, giving hope to their otherwise hopeless life. The prophecy however turns out banal and insufficient to incite any change to their socioeconomic status. Two years after graduating from the university, Sisi remains unemployed. From going after her lofty dream by first applying to bank jobs, she humbles her aspiration and applies to other kinds of considerably unremarkable jobs. Yet, she does not get a single interview invitation. It dawns on her that the prophecy is an illusion at best and a sham at worst, and her hard work is nothing but worthless in a capitalist economy. The capitalist system is rigged against her and there is no breakthrough forthcoming: "Why bother? Chisom asked her father when he tried to encourage her. Unless you have found that one of your friends is the director of any of the banks, because that is how things work, you know?" (23). Through Sisi's inability to find employment despite doing everything right—studying hard at school and graduating from a reputable university with a good grade, Unigwe captures the shortcomings of capitalist ideology. In the context of this postcolonial contemporary capitalist society, the prophecy is not an innocuous spiritual act. It is deployed as a medium in service to a functioning capitalist economy.

Postcolonial capitalist utopia is bound to crumble without dreams, illusions and models of excellence that inspire the working class to keep working, dreaming, and hoping for a breakthrough that alters their life exponentially. The unyielding belief in the system to reward hard work and educational achievements as displayed by Sisi's father is a capitalist fabrication designed to keep the working class working instead of rebelling against the system. For instance, Sisi's father is a civil servant with the Ministry of Works who had imagined that "one day he would be able to buy a car" but can neither afford to own a recycled car, nor a decent living quarter from his salary. His salary has remained stagnant even as cost of living continues to skyrocket over the years. A presidential ban is placed on the importation of cars, shortly after a "certain type of lace" is removed from the market for the exclusive use of the president's wife (90). His dream of owning a decent living quarter before the birth of his children proves impracticable under these austere (post)colonial conditions. These events communicate that the problem is not his lack of university education, but the capitalist system adopted by postcolonial Nigeria. The working-class belief that one day, they could rise in status to join the minority wealthy class at the top exploits them to maintain the systemic inequality. Try as the working class might, the majority will remain subjugated, as exemplified by Sisi's father who never catches a big break despite his years of hard work. Instead, a forewarning about major job cuts that could also affect him is brought to his attention. Rather than see the flaw in the system, Sisi's father believes that his inability to transcend his economic class is a personal failing rather than a systemic one and the only way to remedy that situation is to help his daughter become a university graduate:

> For, as her father would say, there were only two certainties in their lives: death and Chisom's good job. Death was a given (many, many years from now by God's grace. Amen!) and with her university degree nothing should stand in the way of the good job (very soon. Only a matter of time. University graduates are in high demand! High demand!) His belief in a university education so intrinsically tied to his belief in his daughter's destined future as to be irrevocable (21).

The unrewarding nature of the capitalist system leads Sisi to accept the exploitative option—another capitalist exploitative mechanism that lands her in Belgium as a commercial sex worker, as consequence of her racial-gendered marginal existence. Achieving her lifelong dream of transcending her family's

socioeconomic class status was more conceivable with this arrangement than staying back in Nigeria. Staying back would mean, "giving life the go-ahead to treat her dreams with derision, same as it had done with her parents" (89). As her agency as a Black migrant sex worker in Antwerp significantly diminishes, so does her gratitude for the gift of the opportunity to be there at all increases. This contradiction exemplifies the impact of intersectional oppression on the agential capacity of women existing at the margins of race and socioeconomic class.

> She had watched her dreams and those of people around her scatter every which way. Like having a jar of marbles, glossy with promise, tip and scatter, hiding the marbles out of sight, under chairs and under cupboards. Antwerp was where she would tease those marbles out, gather them and have them fulfil their promise. It was the place to be when your dreams died, the place of miracles: a place where dead dreams resurrected and soared and allowed you to catch them and live them (105).

In the flashback to Efe's adolescent life, the reader meets an impressionable sixteen-year-old girl abandoned to her vices by a father who is unable to recover from depression after the death of his wife. As the eldest child, this becomes a major event in her life, as the responsibility of caring for her father and three younger siblings is thrust upon her. With her father adopting the habit of drowning his grief in "glass after glass of *ogogoro* at the local beer parlour", their socioeconomic status, which is already at a low point, deteriorates even further (Unigwe 58). Her hunger for a luxurious life makes her vulnerable to Titus, a forty-five-year-old married man with "a fortune that was rumoured to be vast" (49). With the promise of ostentatious things such as shoes and clothes, Titus is able to take advantage of her vulnerability. He has sex repeatedly with her in dingy hotels until she becomes pregnant, after which he abandons her. The traumatic stories of abortions resulting in death paralyzes her with fear, culminating in her decision to keep the pregnancy. With Titus refusing to take responsibility and no support from her father, her financial capability stretches even thinner. To provide for the needs of her teenage siblings and baby boy, she unhappily transfers the domestic responsibility to her immediate younger sister and undertakes several cleaning jobs that keeps her away from home and her son. Similar to Sisi's family's steadfast faith in an auspicious prophecy to alter their destitution, Efe immerses herself in praying for a miraculous change to her life. Her prayer ranges from soliciting for impossibilities, such as longer

hours in a day so she has more work hours, to praying for even more work that can generate more income. Her life, like Sisi is a textbook example of how labor does not conquer poverty under capitalism.

In contrast to Sisi, who interacts with life in a manner that claims educational perception and enlightenment despite her socioeconomic status, Efe's agency is even more constrained by illiteracy. The possibility of socio-economic transcendence is complicated with her mother's gendered nurturing together with her withdrawal from school. During an episode of self-deprecating thought about the possibility of marriage after having an illegitimate child, she recollects her mother's relentless sentiment that she was born a wife and will make a perfect one, especially with a mother who is passionate about socializing her into one. It appears that her mother's approach to transcending their class status is to make her pliable and modest enough to attract a rich suitor, a plan botched by an illegitimate child. Again, her illiteracy makes her a compliant victim, shifting the power to have an informed opinion on her choices away from her. By accepting the patriarchal shame of having a child out of wedlock, she by extension accepts the choices of survival handed out by the patriarchalized capitalist structures. In the absence of a promising rich husband to give her a "break from the scrimping and the cleaning and the tiredness that was taking over her life" (52), she agrees to the terms of the pimp without any question. Becoming a sex worker so her son can have a high chance of survival in order to assume responsibility for her in her old, tired age becomes her principal motivation. Yet again, a cycle of defeatist survival and predetermined obligation is signaled.

For Ama, born to a middle-class family, experiencing sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather from the age of eight would cause a tremendous change to her life direction. Sent packing after confiding in her subdued mother, she relocates to Lagos to live with her mother's cousin who owns a canteen, where she is required to assist in cooking and serving in return for boarding. Serving in the canteen brings her in close contact with successful young professional women who patronize the canteen during their lunch breaks. Not much background however is provided as to how they come about their material success. However, for Ama, their outward success is more than enough to stimulate her hankering for the capitalist dream. Unigwe's narrativization of these young successful women provides a context through which we can examine the structure of capitalism. These successful young women with their "expensive handbags" and "sweet smelling fragrance of perfume and freedom" are showpieces of capitalism, weaponized to provoke optimism in the consciousness

of the poor working class (160). The everyday conviviality with the young professional women reminds Ama of her dreams that are at the risk of sinking into oblivion in the hustle and bustle of her life. While she is grateful for her life in Lagos, she is described as a feisty character with deep yearning for a better life than Lagos was willing to provide her. After ten months, her life in Lagos acquires a monotonous menial quality that begins to bore her. She becomes tortured with thoughts of how to break the limitations imposed on her by her socioeconomic class: "But how? How could she break a circle, a line that connected to itself, looping itself around her, manacling her so that she could hardly move?" (161). In Ama's overall interaction, the novel captures a character's compulsion to rupture whatever socio-economic limitations are imposed on her agency. From exposing her stepfather's years of sexual abuse despite the risk of disownment to initiating friendships with the women-regulars at the canteen, the novel captures a woman who desires to attain ownership of her agency and transcend her socio-economic and gendered status.

Ama, like Sisi is very cognizant of the structural inequality impeding her agency. While exhibiting an ingratiating front to the canteen regulars, she is not grateful for the crumbs of benevolence doled out to her. She has a strong sense of entitlement to an emancipated life: "She saw the life she could live (she had a right to it as much as these women did, didn't she?), fluttering about the room, long after the women had eaten and gone" (161). She knows that working in the canteen would never bring her closer to the financial freedom embodied by the young women who patronize the canteen during their lunch breaks. She would never be able to "save enough from working in the *buka* to set up her own business" (166). Only by sheer luck might this be possible, an image Dele, the pimp would come to represent in her life. Her desperation becomes nourishment for a capitalist structure, as an imagined agency is promoted in the very much gendered exploitative work offered to her by the pimp—a capitalist proxy: "You been working here now for how long? Seven months? Eight months? Almost a pregnancy! You na fine woman. You deserve better. You wan' better?" (162). While first violently rejecting Dele's offer, a reevaluation of her sexual abuse by her stepfather and her mother's silence in the face of her revelation triggers her acceptance. By having the opportunity to be paid in return for her service of sex, she could reclaim her agency and transcend the injustice of the patriarchal and capitalist structures embodied by her stepfather and her mother's material silence. So, even when the pimp demands for sex in return for his sponsorship approval, she regards it as a sacrifice necessary "to achieve her dream" (169). For Ama, the patriarchalized capitalist system had already

exploited her enough, and the imagined agency through commercial sex-work offers her respite from her powerlessness: "I made this choice. At least, I was given a choice. I came here with my eyes wide open" (114).

Significantly, Unigwe uses the family social unit to enunciate the discourse of socio-economic class hierarchy, power relations and wealth accessibility as a function of generational inheritance for the minority wealthy class and sheer luck or gamble that does not necessarily produce desired results for the majority working class women. The characters' transnational and transborder agential limitations as pre-determined by generational destitution is a perfect representation of how the abuse of women existing at the intersection of Blackness and socioeconomic lower class is exacerbated and access to the minutest bit of agency enjoyed by class-advantaged women is unattainable for them. Under capitalism, the desperation of poor Black women—a creation of the patriarchalized capitalist system is exploited for profit, and the immorality of patriarchy and capitalism is concealed and reinvented as tickets of salvation.

4. Misogynoir and the Construction of Difference

This chapter aims to examine the complexity of multilayered oppression inflicted on the Black female body and the unique ways Black women subvert these racial-gendered oppressive forces. I examine how Black women experience oppression through beauty and labor standards that dehumanize them, marginalize their body morphology, hair texture, and dispossess them of their labor currency. Unlike white women, Black women are forced to navigate gender expectations in ways that white women never have to. That Black people were either forcibly removed from their homelands to the Americas for enslavement or colonized in their homelands is an extensively researched discourse, also significantly represented historically by Black women's writings. Caught between Euro-American patriarchy and Black patriarchy, many Black female fiction writers (African, Afro-American and Afro-European) have had to deploy a transatlantic character to their storytelling projects. By exploring and adopting a range of positions reflecting their personal and collective consciousness of their struggle and experiences, they have not only adopted different strategies and most often parallel priorities from their white female counterparts, but have also come to share "similar aesthetic attitudes in spite of factors that separate them" (Ogunyemi 1985, 64). Contemporary Black women's writing continues in its creative labor of recognizing and advancing Black women's consciousness. These narratives continue to actively center Black women's humanity and discard both Western and pan-African single-axis cliches of liberational politics. Adichie's *Americanah*, Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* are remarkable contributions to this ever expanding literary corpus.

4.1 White Gaze and the Undesirability of Black Hair

In *Americanah*, *A Bit of Difference*, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *We Need New Names*, the Black female characters' racialized relationships with their body takes central stage. For Black women and girls, this racialized relationship is not a recent development. Theories of racial superiority interwoven with physical features from European and white American race scientists have abounded since the 16th century. In the recently published book titled, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, Sabrina Strings builds on the indispensable contributions of Anglo-Saxon artists and scientists to the legacy of social distinction as we have it today, and the active role Black female bodies played in the development of these propagations. Undertaking a historiography of this racialized embodied abstraction show that these developments date back to the works produced by artists and philosophers during the Renaissance, in which Black women were depicted with the intention to further white supremacist rhetorics (2019, 8–49). An evolution in the relationship between skin color and beauty is set in this period, with whiteness becoming integral to the elevation and glorification of women's physical attraction and validation. While the Renaissance period set the stage, the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial activities would contribute immensely to the promulgation of the "perverse primitivity" (52) and undesirability of Black femininity in modern discourse.

In *Americanah*, Black female characters' intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships with their bodies is focalized. The novel, partly set in Nigeria, the US, and the UK, begins with Ifemelu's visit to the African hair salon in the US. The hair salon, like all the other hair salons she knows is located in the racially Othered, low-income part of the city, exemplified by walls painted with "graffiti, dank buildings, and no white people" (Adichie 10). The vivid description of the African hair salons draws attention to the antithetical and Othered position of Black aesthetics within the broad cultural climate. In *A Bit of Difference*, the very first chapter titled "Reorientation" starts by foregrounding the magnified photograph of an African woman "with desert terrain behind her" with the caption "I am Powerful" (Atta 1). On Deola's arrival at the Atlanta airport from the UK, where she resides, she is confronted with this striking photograph. Following this prelude, a Black woman with an afro and silver hoops in her ears obscuring the photograph from Deola's view is pulled into the narrative frame. Atta strategically positions these interactive frames to foreshadow interactions and conversations around race, gender and class that is to run through most of

the novel. While waiting to be processed out of the airport, Deola reflects on the symbolic meanings of the magnified photograph. Even though she does not come to any conclusion on what the photograph could be suggesting, she nevertheless expresses hope that the model receives adequate compensation for her photograph. This expression of hope for labor reimbursement flags an implicit issue of Black women's images being exploited for public display of jarring counter-discourses. While the reader is still grappling with Deola's musing, another subtle but suggestive information is introduced into the chronology of the storyline. We learn that the photograph is used for the advertisement of a charity organization that Deola did not quite catch. She considers going back to have another glance but finally decides not to due to flight fatigue.

Contemplating to return to ascertain the name of the charity organization signals to the reader that this image piques Deola's curiosity so greatly, thereby offering a timely reflection on the global representations of Black women. This interactive moment of a Black woman character in afro and hoops, obscuring an amplified image of a Black woman, offers a space for a timely introduction to misogynoir and racial capitalism. By bringing a Black female character into the narrative frame and pulling the magnified photo into the background, Atta centers Black women in their everyday life as beacons of empowerment and self-acceptance within mainstream culture in opposition to the symbolic meaning of the photograph as "force of stereotypes" to serve and maintain the "hegemony of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Bailey 2021, 1–2). For an African reader who is quite conversant with the pervasive pathologizing narrative of Africa, Africans and most especially African women on the global stage, this additional information with charity in the mix portends even more troubling narrative engagement with socio-political, racialized, and gendered issues. The first chapter, promptly crisscrossed with an undercurrent of postcolonial, race and gender issues, could be interpreted as a foreshadow of deeper, alarming confessions and connections to come. In a similar vein with *Americanah*, the plot is set in the transnational environ of the US, the UK and Nigeria. In *On Black Sisters' Street* and *We Need New Names*, the historic significance of afro hair and the pervasive racism Black women face because of their natural hair is also weaved into the narrative texts. From the first chapter of *On Black Sisters' Street*, the plot quickly moves to one of the four African women in the rush of preparing for work who is at the same time worried about her hair appearance. Joyce's hair is described as a "wilderness that would not be subdued" (Unigwe 5). The reader finds out that Sisi, the protagonist, is the only one who can braid and in the unmistakable absence of Sisi, Joyce settles

for holding the hair in a bun, hoping that their Madam would not pass any offensive comment on the state of her hair. In *We Need New Names*, reference is made to African women engaging in the activity of gossiping while doing "one another's hair" (26).

Returning to Adichie's *Americanah*, the reader first meets Ifemelu taking a train ride from one city to another to braid her hair. The salon in Trenton becomes a narrative place where a long flashback to Ifemelu's childhood life in Nigeria unfolds, centering societal attitude towards Black women's hair as a significant convention through which engagement with Black women's lived experiences in racially and patriarchally stratified spaces can be quantified. In addition, the salon set in a "shabby block", and the African women braiders described as set in their own way of doing things and immune to the "cosmetic niceties of American customer service" presents a politically charged narrative space with double or more signification (Adichie 15). To deconstruct the complexities residing in this fictional space, one must explore the cast of characters, economic relations, non-normative feminine practices, and social interactions being recycled. The cast of characters who walk in to get their hair braided come from a wide range of class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. The African women braiders hold the power to decide the wage for their labor and enter into contingent negotiations with their clients. To enter is to accept to, if not conform, at least be open to explore the racialized feminine self-expression happening in this space. One of the ways the braiders transcend the limitations imposed on them by dominant culture is to establish some form of commonality with their clients on gender, racial, national, or ethnic level via chitchats. While the salon is located in a castaway part of the city, exploring the varied interactions inside the salon in their defiance of class, racial, national, and ethnic boundaries present a unique insight—that this salon and the braiders' social niceties remain untainted by dominant white America because of their segregation. Indeed, their seclusion to a poor urban area while imbued with anti-Black racist connotations, also returns them to the center and enables them to negotiate their agency without the added pressure of submitting to the palate of white supremacist consumption.

According to Tabora Johnson and Teiahsha Bankhead, the presentation of Black women's and girls' hair is inextricably linked to their identity (2013, 86). Throughout the ages, long before European interruption, hair for African people served as a significant outlet of self-expression used to denote "cultural identity, spirituality, character makeup, and notions of beauty" (87). Bewildered by the versatility and alteration embodied by Africans through their hair,

Johnson and Bankhead claim that one of the symbolic acts carried out by the European slave traders in their effort to dehumanize enslaved Africans would be to shave their heads (88). Against this background, to then declare Black women's hyper-awareness of their hair presentation a universal sexist convention experienced by women, would be to ignore the deep historical currents of Black hair symbolism alongside its violent racialized stigmatization. At the salon, one of the hair braiders shows her displeasure with Ifemelu's natural afro-hair, commenting on the maintenance difficulty. "Why you don't have relaxer?", she asks Ifemelu (Adichie 15). From the conversation, the reader comprehends that Ifemelu's refusal to use relaxer to straighten her hair is considered ludicrous by the braider. Even when Ifemelu attempts to make her reconsider her internalized anti-Black reservation by showing her the appropriate comb and how to comb natural hair gently, the braider is unwilling to reconsider her idealized notion of good, unproblematic, and appropriate hair. Ifemelu's proselytizing fervor for natural African textured hair is however not instinctual. Her relationship with her hair, as with other Black female characters, is from the onset defined through the gaze of whiteness. Altering our natural afro texture to relaxed, straight texture in order to successfully and uncontroversially navigate professional spaces is an unspoken rule familiar to Black women across the diaspora and on the African continent. Ifemelu's employment exigency in the US also requires this texture complicity. Her friend temperately instructs her to lose her braids and straighten her hair. "Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job" (250).

This friendly advice reminds Ifemelu of her first introduction to an upsetting anti-Black American system. Her aunt Uju's casual and complacent decision to loosen her braids and relax her hair for her upcoming medical interviews bewilders her. "So there are no doctors with braided hair in America" (146), she asks to which Aunt Uju responds, "I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (146). Akin to Ifemelu's counsel by her Black friend, Aunt Uju's benevolent direction is also bequeathed to her by her Black friend. Fully immersed in the system, Ifemelu knows not to disregard the instruction, because the profession suitable for unaltered afro "full and cool" (252) hair would be in the entertainment as a "backup singer in a jazz band" (252). The "full and cool" description used for afro hair denotes the exoticized category Black hair is assigned. A further distinction in articulation with skin color is made between professional curly and unprofessional curly, with afro "kinky" texture regarded

as the unprofessional kind. "[…] but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky" (252). Even when her scalp is dangerously burned by the chemicals, it is considered "just a little burn" (251) by the hairdresser. A price to pay for submitting to the white supremacist beauty standard, looking "pretty" and attaining the desirable "white-girl swing" (251).

Deola, in *A Bit of Difference* and Darling in *We Need New Names* have similar experiences in the UK and the US. Deola's afro is racially Othered by her white classmates and exoticized by a boy in her class who requests to rub it for good luck. For Darling, who moved to Washington to live with her aunt, an accomplishment of a childhood dream to escape the legacies of colonial trauma, she soon realizes that her new life is an extension of her old life, only now with new additional intersectional struggles. Coming from a distressed post-colonial nation and witnessing its ruins, chaos, and degradation at the hands of power-hungry neo-colonial political leaders, Darling's struggle to break out of this doomed reality is manifested in her obsessive desire for escape. However, in America, she discovers another version of race relations and the humiliation of racism, which is an extension of her everyday experience in postcolonial Zimbabwe. In Washington, her difference is exacerbated by her isolation. She would wish for death to save her from the mockery of other kids about her name, accent, and hair. In the end, the trauma of the anti-Black dehumanizing conventions impacts her identity so greatly that she loses her connection with herself; "[…] in the end I just felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes, in my language, in my head, everything" (Bulawayo 165). For job interviews, Deola in *A Bit of Difference* chemically straightens her hair to increase the chances of positive outcomes. After she gets the job and switches back to her afrocentric hairstyles, a partner in her firm instantly comments that her braids are "unprofessional" (Atta 63).

The impact colonial legacy has on beauty aesthetics in which white Eurocentric features were located at the top of the hierarchy shapes not only the quality of Black women's lives but also their intrapersonal relationship and agential capacity. According to Shirley Tate, it comes as no surprise these legacies "continue to impact on judgements of beauty, femininity and desirability" (2007, 302). Meanwhile, anti-racist and anti-colonial counter discourse celebrating and centering the aesthetics of Black bodies have also emerged across the Black diaspora. The Black body, as a site of "political contestation" (Dash 2006, 27) has had its fair share of resistance and counter-resistance. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's subjectivity undergoes gradual deconstructive phases.

After experiencing hair loss as a result of the harsh straightening chemical, she, with the support of her friend decides to cut her hair. Her activist friend fully given to her proselytizing demeanor, likens the relaxing procedure of afro hair to choosing to live in cage, and forcing one's hair to "do what it wasn't meant to do" (Adichie 258). It takes quite some time for Ifemelu to fully accept and embrace her natural 'kinky' hair. She avoids going to work, calling in sick, and "willing an unknown miracle to happen" (258) that can "loosen her hair's springy coils, stretch out the kinkiness a little […]" (258). In *A Bit of Difference*, Subu's inability to be seen without a hair weave despite her "born-again" status is noteworthy (Atta 29). While being born-again comes with a strict adherence to Christian norms that disavow of beauty aesthetics like makeup and weaves, Subu is nevertheless unable to relinquish her wearing of weaves—a manifestation of her disconcertment with her natural Black hair.

Ifemelu in *Americanah*, in addition to her self-deprecation, suffers the hyper-visible scrutiny of everyone. As Margo Okazawa-Rey et al. note, one of the pathological implications of racialized concepts of beauty materializes in Black women's internalization of their unattractive and undesirable physical qualities:

> If a dark-skinned young girl is constantly told that she is ugly, and experiences treatment that supports these views, she may begin to feel as such. This is particularly true when the treatment she receives within her community of origin, the black community, is consistent with the negative and self-deprecating messages doled out by the larger society (1987, 91).

Ifemelu's hair becomes entangled in linguistic, political, and symbolic referencing. In her tentative journey of acceptance, her hair is referenced as a "cool and brave look" by her white boyfriend (258), problematized as a possible political or sexual statement by her co-workers: "Why did you cut your hair, hon? Are you a lesbian" (262) and demonized by her aunt Uju: "There is something scruffy and untidy about natural hair" (269).

In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola's upper-class upbringing is entangled with anti-Black beauty standards. Her childhood friend, Bandele Davis, who like her was raised in both Nigeria and England, is reluctant to be associated with African quandaries, and characterizes only "skinny blondes with AA-cup" in his novel. His novel, about a "nineteen-year-old Nigerian who slept around" is shortlisted for an African writer's prize, yet he is committed to snubbing his fellow Black female writer's activist writings on misogynoir. He calls the Black events fruit-

less activities and the Black female writers' disposition "false angst" (Atta 47). His use of light skinned and straight-haired women as signifier of the beauty ideal in his novels, and his anger at Black women's self-affirmation is ironical in light of the racialized hierarchy embedded in his characterizations. In this context, Black women can only choose between an invisible or hyper-visible state. They are not considered desirable and under-represented in mainstream writings and are yet criticized for creating a safe space for the affirmation of Black beauty. Other male characters like Deola's brother and his friends, raised no doubt under the influence of the legacies of the colonial past, are only interested in girls with "foreign blood" (87). Their judgment of beauty and desirability follows a racialized pattern. Bandele's elder brother, has a girlfriend whose hair reaches her shoulders, fetching tremendous interest from numerous boys. Lanre, Deola's brother, ends up married to his high school sweetheart with foreign blood. It is clear that the assessment of femininity, beauty and desirability, following Eurocentric criteria, captures the psyche of African men as well. For Ifemelu in *Americanah*, when she finds out her boyfriend has been exchanging emails with another girl, her reaction reveals the subordinate relationship she has with her Black hair and body:

> Pictures she had seen of his ex-girlfriends goaded her, the slender Japanese with straight hair dyed red, the olive-skinned Venezuelan with corkscrew hair that fell to her shoulders, the white girl with waves and waves of russet hair. And now this woman, whose looks she did not care for, but who had long straight hair. She shut the laptop. She felt small and ugly (Adichie 261).

For Darling on the other hand in *We Need New Names*, whose pre-teen existential reality is scarred with hunger, deprivation, and violence, differently from Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Deola in *A Bit of Difference*, who belong to middle and upper class, her transformations informed by aspects and attitudes of her new place moves at a slower, guarded and non-committal pace. Perhaps, this is as a result of being an illegal immigrant which means having additional struggles to grapple. Living in the US and now on the verge of womanhood, we see a shadow of vulnerability and inadequacy in her notion of beauty, femininity and agential capacity. In describing her two new friends, she describes one with a weave and a sense of superiority that comes with owning a weave:"Kristal thinks that since she taught us to wear makeup and has a weave, she is better than Marina and myself, but the truth is she can't even write a sentence correctly in English to show that she is indeed American" (Bulawayo

199). This conscious link Darling draws between owning weaves and beauty superiority stems from newer discourses of body politic she is confronted with. Her tone however takes on a somewhat derisive, antagonistic quality to this layer of superiority. Her identity is still however provisional, undergoing re-constructions and a site of future eventualities and potentialities. The predominance of anti-Blackness and ingrained superiority complex reminiscent of white supremacist patriarchal structures insinuate that Darling might become so damaged by this Eurocentric scrutiny that she either suffers a split or loses complete agency. Will she be able to successfully negotiate the demands of the structures of racism and colonialism that leave the majority of Black female immigrants feeling inadequate and helpless? Will the constant performance of her identity and pandering to a white gaze disrupt her quest for her Black female subjectivity? Will she survive the traumatic character of these oppressive systems or will she internalize her own inferiority so much so that the possibility for cognitive modification is nullified.

If there is a preoccupation that ties the four novels together, it is the allusion to the mobility and consumption of Black women and girls' appearance as rooted in racialized and colonial notions of beauty. The transnational manifestation of anti-Black misogynoir is continuously reinforced. Black female characters in *A Bit of Difference* are frequently described with their hairstyles – weaves. In Nigeria, Ifemelu's mother is described as having full jet-black hair that:

> Drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration. Her father called it a crown of glory. "Is it your real hair? Strangers would ask, and then reach out to touch it reverently. Others would say 'Are you from Jamaica?' as though only foreign blood could explain such bounteous hair that did not thin at the temples (Adichie 49).

As I extrapolated in the first few pages that the anti-Black control of Black women's hair aesthetics is an entree to the racial and patriarchal marginalization Black women's in the global world, this extract above is the first point of departure from the long flashback Ifemelu has in the salon in Trenton about her adolescence. After insisting to the hairdresser that she likes her hair "the way God made it" and refusing to accept that natural hair is difficult to manage, the narrative moves back to unfold the hair socio-politics in Nigeria with

Ifemelu growing up in the shadow of her mother's jet-black highly desirable hair (15–49). Ifemelu's desire for her hair texture to look like her mother's, carries more meaning than a young girl simply being in awe and desiring to walk in the footsteps of her mother. Ifemelu's desire demonstrates an internalization of a notion of hair beauty, stylization and presentation that adheres to a racial binary structure of desirable versus undesirable. One fine day into her tenth birthday, Ifemelu witnesses her mother chopping off and burning all her coveted hair, announcing her conversion from Catholicism to a "Bible-believing" denomination, and claiming to be a born-again Christian. While this action appears to be an ordinary religious doctrine, it becomes pregnant with meaning when read alongside the larger narrative of the patriarchal and racial policing of Black female character's bodies, and the inherited baggage of insecurities as consequence. A case in point is Subu in Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, who cannot go out without a hair weave despite her "born-again" status (29). Juxtaposing these two novels, the reader acutely feels this ratification of Black women's hair appearance as a precondition for their participation and acceptance into organized social spaces. While Ifemelu's mother eagerly cuts her relaxed hair to acquire this new badge of belonging, Subu is not as willing to be seen without her weaves. One clearly sees the intersection of Black women's social capital meticulously regulated through their hair, and the merit of whiteness in their repository of self-satisfaction.

In the secondary school Ifemelu attended in Nigeria, skin color and hair texture present an essential advantage in the beauty awards presented to students, emphasizing a connection between race and gender. Ginika, Ifemelu's best friend who is described as having "caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like" (67) is voted prettiest girl every year. This narrative undoubtedly ties beauty to Eurocentric bodies or proximity to Eurocentric bodies. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, one of the sex workers, acquired for the purpose of sex work in Belgium is sent by her trafficker to a salon in Lagos. The particular type of hair he demands to be replicated on her is the common Eurocentric kind. When the braider attempts to do a different style, he emphatically tells her in pidgin, "perm am. Put relaxer. Make she look like *oyibo* [white] woman! I wan' make she look like white woman!' (Unigwe 31). The braider also appears to affirm the symbolic idealized hair standards present in Black spaces. She passes compliments on the young girl's hair texture over and over again; "You get good hair" (Unigwe 31). What appears to be a simple compliment is loaded with colonial racial binaries. This means that the young girl's texture adheres to the Eurocentric standard

because a review of Black hair discourse consistently shows that Black hair is neither considered good nor widely accepted transnationally (Thompson 2009, 836).

Ama, one of the sex trafficking victims, recounts a childhood story of distress revolving around her natural hair being straightened with a hot comb by her grouchy mother. After the completion, Ama would carefully touch her hair to confirm that she has "proper oyibo hair!" (Unigwe 126).[1] The symbolic ideal of good hair in the novel—straightened texture, wigs, and hair extensions—is consistently maintained with references to the hair of white people. Achieving and affording hair similar or close to whiteness is a goal of many of the Black women in the novels. A rag to riches story of Dele, the sex trafficker is constituted on the sales of human hair, indicating that quality human hair is coveted and in popular demand by Black women: "He had no competition when it came to good-quality hair extensions. 'Straight from India. Not the *yeye* horsehair you see all over this city. I get 100 per cent human hair' he often boasted, eyes bulging with pride" (51). For women, class status symbol is defined by the kind of hair extensions they can afford to buy and the hair salons they patronize. Hair is a key medium of the intersection of class and beauty accessibility and an evaluative tool for a woman's level of attractiveness. Ama would aspire to attain that class where she could afford to patronize "a salon like Headmasters, ask for a pedicure and a manicure while a professional hairdresser wove expensive extensions into her hair" (161). Compliments of their hair extensions are anticipated and cherished, especially because they have to spend "thousands of nairas for their hair" (161). Due to the loss of their organic cultural affirmation, these compliments provide for them affirmative rhetorics that their acquired hairstyle emulate the dominant beauty ideal.

In *We Need New Names* however, the characterization of weaves and women who adorn weaves follow a different route. A strong, implicit value judgment about good versus bad hair is quite lacking, perhaps because most of the events are focalized from a child's perspective. However, a beauty norm is evident. Hair consciousness rooted in Eurocentric standard reverberates throughout the narrative text. Hair description follows a similar pattern; "long shiny that isn't really hers" (Bulawayo 38), two black girls walk out of a Chinese construction site in "skinny jeans and weaves and heels" (45), the symbolic action of Black mothers straightening their hair with "red-hot rock" (59) on election days

---

1   *Oyibo* is a Yoruba word commonly used to refer to white people in the South-West of Nigeria.

to symbolize hope, beauty of optimism and change. Yet, there is a different tone to the narrator's cursory interests in other Black female characters who adorn weaves. Darling characterizes her African American friend's inability to write correct English as more significant than her ownership of a weave. Even though Kristal might believe in herself that she is superior to her because she "has a weave" (199), Darling believes there are other standards that define one's identity and superiority complex.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu expresses a shocked reaction to her Aunt Uju's conformity to the American anti-Black standard of professionalism. Going by Ifemelu's shocked reaction, one might feel inclined to believe that Black female body politic in her home country, Nigeria, from which she migrated is not socially and culturally constructed through a Eurocentric gaze. However, deconstructing the yardstick used to validate racialized beauty, as well as Ifemelu's reflective journey to loving and embracing her natural hair in the US, exposes the racialized beauty hierarchy in Nigeria, with European features or proximity to European features considered the epitome of desirability and African features considered undesirable. Furthermore, a conversation amongst the women-returnees in Nigeria reveals that their natural hair journey, much like Ifemelu, who first loathed her natural hair and considered her physical appearance 'ugly', might just have begun with their sojourn in Europe and the US. A 2013 qualitative cross-cultural study, conducted by Vanessa King and Dieynaba Niabaly on the motivating factors that influence various hair choices for both African and African American women, substantiates my aforementioned analysis. Interviewing twelve study participants with natural and relaxed hair from both groups, the study asked the following crucial questions: "Would you say the current state of your hair is solely your choice, meaning what/who would you consider to have influenced your current hair choices? Do you feel that your hair choices play a role in how people perceive you? If so, please explain. Do you think that the racially/ethnically discriminatory history of Black people has affected Black women's hair?" (7–8). Noteworthy relevant particularities in each group's experiences are that, while African college women with relaxed hair classified their choice as simply a hairstyle uninformed by socio-cultural and institutional embargo, African American college women "felt that their hair was an important part of their identity [...] and that it was important to be able to maintain their hair and tame the natural hair they were born with" (11). All participants with natural hair from both groups claim that their decision to wear their natural hair has garnered more societal and familial scrutiny and disapproval than

necessary in both their home countries and the US. However, African college women with natural hair admit that their exposure and decision to go natural is as a result of their sojourn in the US. One can conclude that before their arrival to the US, they had limited to no consciousness of the assimilatory forces that constrain their beauty ideal, taking for granted their marker of femininity as a reasonable attractive standard. This demonstrates that a white systemic standard that is not subverted or resisted by the majority of the female population, like in the Black diaspora, is present on the continent. On the symbolic representation and psychological underpinning of relaxed hair, all participants with relaxed hair disengage their choice from a desire to assimilate to a Western beauty ideal of femininity. Even though they all agree that Black hair has been historically oppressed, misrepresented, and stigmatized through colonization for Africans on the continent and slavery for African Americans in the Black diaspora, they contend that Black women's hair choices have evolved from a racialized subjugated indication to one of subjective beauty preference and discretion. Accordingly, it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Black women's experiences stimulated by various socio-cultural, historical, and ideological shifts. However, one must be careful to declare that Black hair is simply hair positively relieved of political implications. According to Cheryl Thompson, despite the "plethora of hair options" at Black women's disposal, a review of the contemporary discourse on Black hair "reminds us that it is still a contentious issue", and natural hair "is so often negatively marked for its difference" and remains an "unwanted politically charged marker in the workplace" both in the Black diaspora and on the African continent (2009, 835–840).

In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola's mother remarks on her hair during her visit to Nigeria. "Is this a new hairstyle? [...] It is a prelude to a disagreement they have too many times" (Atta 71). When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria in *Americanah*, her natural hairdo is sullenly described as *jagajaga* [rough and messy] by her office secretary. In a conversation with one of her co-workers who also returned to Nigeria after residing in the US for a number of years, the reader gathers that her co-worker's *dada* [locs] is also condemned and judged as unprofessional. She recounts to Ifemelu that her aunt's job offer at a bank came at the price of cutting her locs. Additionally, at the Nigerpolitan club meeting (an association for Nigerian returnees from Europe and the US), the women-returnees, all adorned in natural hairdos, engage in a virtuous discussion on the beauty climate in Nigeria. They all agree that the hair stylists in Nigeria have little to no experience with styling natural African hair. Instead, they propose

that the women-returnees' hair be relaxed for easy management. Conversely, in their revelation that the hairdressers "struggled and fumbled to comb natural hair, as though it were an alien eruption, as though their own hair was not the same way before it was defeated by chemicals" (Adichie 501–502), the women-returnees verbalize a certain kind of smugness and absurdity at the Nigerian women's obliviousness to their embodied subordination to European standards. What these social conventions demonstrate is that natural afro-hair is not considered an attractive appearance. It is within this shadow of skin color and hair consciousness that Ifemelu (as other Black girls) is raised, cultivated, and required to flourish.

4.2 Intersection of Anti-Black Misogyny and Fatphobia

Central to Adichie's *Americanah* is the cross-cultural discourse of fat stigmatization, with attention to how they negatively impact Black women in the US. In *We Need New Names* and *A Bit of Difference,* contours of body politic, anti-Black misogyny and fat stigmatization do not hold a central narrative but are alluded to several times. In *Americanah*, the pathologizing of Black women's bodies is narratively enmeshed with the devaluation of Blackness and Black hair. Adichie right from the first few pages of the novel takes a stab at the entangled character of the axes of stratification and oppression (race, gender, and class) in body discourse. Working and residing at Princeton, Ifemelu's Black (racialized) hair-care regimen requires her to travel to Trenton, known as a predominantly Black city, in order to get her hair braided. Bemoaning the lack of Black salons in Princeton, she however understands why this is the case, considering that Princeton is a predominantly white city, with only a few "light-skinned and lank-haired" Black locals. Her characterization of both cities reveals the layers of stratification existing in the US. While Princeton is described with words like tranquil, green, neutral smell, clean, delicately overpriced, quiet, affluent, ease, and certain, all evocative of de-racialization, Trenton is characterized with words like dank buildings, graffiti, hot, with a dysfunctional, absence of white people, all evocative of racialization and anti-Blackness. These signifiers of clean versus dirty reveal the structural gap between white privileged groups and Black underprivileged groups and the continuation of the constellations of systematic oppression Black people face. Regardless of the exclusionary measures she is forced to grapple with, Ifemelu is grateful for the privilege to be associated with white "affluent ease", to be afforded the opportunity to "pre-

tend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty" (Adichie 3).

Not only are the two spaces described in absolute symbolic binaries, there is a juxtaposition between Black and white physical appearances. While the people waiting at the Princeton Junction station are characterized as "white and lean", the people crowding the platform in Trenton are characterized as "Black, many of them fat" (6). This characterization demonstrates that there is an intersection between fatness, status symbol (the body as an external indication of economic and social status) and race. During her first year in the US, Ifemelu discovers that thinness is a significant component of white American exceptionalism. A strong connection between body size, spatiality, social distinction and economic affluence is seen in the differentiation between "mostly slim white people" alighting at the "stops in Manhattan" and "mostly black and fat" people alighting at Brooklyn (6). Ifemelu quickly learns that the word "fat" is loaded with a repulsive, evil distasteful connotation, "heaving with moral judgment like stupid or bastard, and not a mere description like short or tall" (6).

Reading the analysis of Sabrina Strings's famous 2019 book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* is very illuminating. In establishing the racial origins of fatphobia, Strings argues that Western preoccupation with thinness and aversion to fatness originates from historical racial and religious ideologies used to propagate and preserve white superiority and white hegemonic national identity. According to Strings, artistic renditions of Black Africans by European artists and philosophers were historically created only for self-serving purposes, to make visual commentary on Africans' embodied distinctiveness. This distinction was generated mostly from physical appearance, resulting in body shape and size, next to skin color, becoming integral to the elevation of a woman's physical attraction and validation. Depictions of Black Africans as plump, large, fat, well proportioned, gluttonous, lazy, and stupid saturated colonial writings into the nineteenth century. This stereotype already "lodged in the European imagination" from earlier generation of racial theories, as far back as the sixteenth century, became a symbolic identifier for Black Africans, and "well-rounded physiques" (2019, 16) that were earlier celebrated and revered as a beauty ideal prior to the 16th century soon acquired negative currency. Given that the racial project was for the advancement of white superiority and women were commonly represented as custodians of nation-state and "typically reduced to their bodies" (210), fat stigmatization was doubly used to denigrate Black women and control elite white women, resulting in the classification of body shapes and sizes that served to "natu-

ralize and normalize social hierarchies" (7). Black women's bodies became a "form of text from which racial superiority and inferiority were read" (67), and their beauty evaluation was based on their adherence to "European standards of race and physique" (79). Consequently, fatness persistently conflated with "savage and black" (210) and slimness with graceful white elitism instituted the versions of social hierarchy of desirability politic we have today, thereby appending "a much-needed intersectional component to the analysis of the development of fatphobia and the slender aesthetic" (212).

In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo's cross-cultural characterization of body sizes reminds us that a social interactive dynamic is subject to contextual standards of meaning. The description of her Black characters living in Zimbabwe is socio-politically uncharged. There are no underlying meanings, especially disparaging valuations in descriptors such as tall thin woman, fat adults etc. They are simply vocabularies used to convey well-rounded characterization of her characters. However, a stark difference is noted in the characterization of white and Black characters living outside Zimbabwe. Her narrative tone acquires ample value judgment quality. A tall thin thirty-three-year-old woman from London, visiting Budapest for the first time, exudes graciousness towards Darling and her friends' appraisal of her thinness. She replies in a pleased voice that she "just came off the Jesus diet" (Bulawayo 8). The children, emblematic of a different socio-political climate and class are befuddled by her cheerfulness. "What is there to thank? [...] What is a Jesus diet, and do you mean the real Jesus, like God's child" (8). A white couple is described in similar hypercritical tone. The man is tall and fat, while his wife is described as thin, "like maybe the man eats all her food, like she has the sickness" (114). Through this imagery, Bulawayo engages in a cross-cultural discourse of body politic, alluding to the fact that physique preoccupation and thin preference is rooted in imperial white supremacist patriarchal legacy.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's body in the US becomes hyper-visible and suffers overt disdain from a man in the supermarket who concerns himself with her oral appetite. By loudly condemning her purchase of a "giant bag of Tostitos", with the 'health' moralizing rant that "fat people don't need to be eating that shit" (Adichie 6), he draws a direct connection between her food consumption and body size. Even though mildly offended by this statement, she nevertheless internalizes this dogma, accepting it as an objective sensibility:

> But back home, as she stood and faced the mirror's truth, she realized that she had ignored, for too long, the new tightness of her clothes, the rubbing

together of her inner thighs, the softer, rounder parts of her that shook when she moved. She was fat [...] she was not curvy or big-boned; she was fat, it was the only word that felt true (7).

Fatphobia is also internalized and perpetuated by minor characters like Aunt Fostalina and Ojuigo in *We Need New Names* and *Americanah*. Their obsession with being thin enkindles their abidance by the problematic culture of dieting and body size obsession. Their desire for slimness impacts greatly on their lifestyle and their judgments of beauty and desirability. Ojuigo registers for several "weight watchers" programs, closely monitoring her weight, whilst sneakily eating Twix bars of chocolate (Adichie 302). Aunt Fostalina exercises regularly to instructional TV shows of non-Black women, with the hope that she is able to shrink her body. Her physical exercises and trainings are invested in the pursuit of white supremacist wellness and its signifier, thinness. Evidently, her weight loss exercises, as with the majority of women have absolutely nothing to do with being healthy, as mainstream medical health morality discourses have continued to imply, enforce, and moderate. Existing in a smaller body is the ultimate goal.

Accordingly, Strings maintains that the discourse of wellness in the medical industrial complex is rooted in the motivation to uplift the white race as well as control women's integration into full participation of beauty and desirability. As healthy bodies were gradually conflated with thinness in racial scientific literatures, intentional weight loss rationality and antipathy towards fatness in the medical field activated by the socio-political binary structure of anti-Black misogyny and white race preservation gained considerable traction. In fact, Strings asserts that historically the scientific management of bodies, femininity, weight, health, and dietary habits in the US and much of the West either completely overlooked Black women as they were considered eugenically deficient or focused on Black women to moderate the ethno-religious theories of white exceptionalism and supremacy (195–203). Against this background, the desire to be elevated into the top of the social hierarchy (white elite spaces) and gain social capital for Black women would mean to ignore the sensibility of socio-biological materiality of body variations, accept the cacophony of Anglo-European constructed fat anxiety, and emulate the dietary behaviors and aesthetic evaluations of white people, especially white women.

As African migrant women, both Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Aunt Fostalina in *We Need New Names* realize that slimness is a social currency they can appropriate to their advantage. Ifemelu on her arrival to the US is immediately con-

fronted with a new system of belief that conceives of thinness as a redeeming feature. Ginika, her friend who comes to meet her at the airport is noticeably thin, "much thinner, half her old size, and her head looked bigger, balanced on a long neck that brought to mind a vague, exotic animal" (Adichie 149). Ginika instantly launches into the social advantages of having a thin body. We learn that in Nigeria, manipulating one's body size to ensure thinness is disapproved of, but in America, it is the reverse. Sizing Ifemelu up and down, she evaluates her worthiness, declaring her body the kind of body they like in America. She further confesses that attaining a thin body goal became an aspiration as soon as she arrived in America, from which she developed an eating disorder and was "close to anorexia" (152). "Americans say 'thin.' Here 'thin' is a good word", she proclaims to Ifemelu (157). Ginika's social commentary on the difference in the framings of fatness between America and Nigeria highlights a symbolic cultural boundary. Aunt Fostalina's preoccupation with possessing a smaller sized body puts in motion her foray into diet culture. She constantly demands to know if her body corroborates her weight loss effort and compares her body size with other women. "You think I'm losing weight? Who is fatter, me or Aunt Da? Who is fatter, me or your mother?" (Bulawayo 155). She also experiments with exclusive fruit diets to the detriment of her health and loud misgiving of her partner. Darling watches her deterioration with morbid trepidation that she might soon begin to look as deathly bony as her father who died of HIV. More significantly, cross-cultural perception of fatness, wellness and overall aesthetic judgments reflect in Uncle Kojo's consternation. His clamorous remarks reveal that the thin obsession is a foreign beauty standard adopted by Aunt Fostalina:

> You know me, I actually don't understand why you are doing all this. What are you doing to yourself, Fostalina, really-exactly-what? Kick. And punch. And kick. And punch. Look at you, bones bones bones. All bones. And for what? They are not even African, these women you are doing like, shouldn't that actually tell you something? Three-four-five-six, and kick. And punch. That there is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind. Squat. Bend your knees. Squat. Bend your knees. Squat … And last time I sent family pictures to my mother, she actually cried. Ah ah ah, my son, oh, please please please feed your wife and don't nah bring her here looking like this, you will embarrass us. That's what she said, my mother (Bulawayo 151–152).

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu on her return to Nigeria delays meeting with Obinze because of her weight. She resolves to manipulate her body size back to her teenage "slender self" before she informs Obinze of her return to Nigeria (Adichie 506). Obinze's instant disapproval of Ifemelu's contemplation of her body size also reveals a cultural gap between America and Nigeria. He labels her preoccupation with thinness an American obsession declaring her fatness desirable. Aunt Fostalina in *We Need New Names* purchases a smaller sized dress for a wedding she plans to attend and has to lose even more weight to fit into the dress. She takes pride in her ability to manipulate her body size into the required pounds she desires, yet she suffers from low self-esteem and fatigue. The little contentment she has is derived from comparing her body size to other women. She finally relinquishes her thin currency because she has to work two jobs but continues to torment herself with magazine pictures of thin white women and tv programs of weight loss information and commercials. Ojuigo in *Americanah*, also decisively discontinues her thin obsession because of the program's appellation of fatness as a mental health problem: "I'm not going there again. They treat you as if you have a mental problem. I said no, I don't have any internal issues, please, I just like the taste of food, and the smug woman tells me that I have something internal that I am repressing. Rubbish. These white people think that everybody has their mental problems" (Adichie 302). The Black female characters' profound struggles with conforming to the standard of desirable feminine body in the three novels highlights Sabrina Strings's argument that Anglo-European anti-fat convention that has persisted until today developed from a historical anti-Black imperialist project of racial superiority and exploitation.

4.3 Intersectionality in the Domestic Kitchen Space

The domestic kitchen space has been a site of inexhaustible controversy and debate in Anglo-European feminist discourse. Evoked countlessly as an embodied echo of binary power dynamic, Angela Meah argues that women in the West were entreated to deplore their exclusive ownership of the kitchen, annihilate the gendered division of house chores, contemplate their contribution to their own exploitation within the patriarchal mode of production, and advocate their way into the labor force (2014). Therefore, while the kitchen became an indication of women's inferiority and subjugation in a white heteronormative patriarchal system, the labor market came to symbolize

power, liberation, advancement and dismantling of this system (2014). While feminists in general have unquestionable reasons to criticize the gendered nature of domesticity, Black feminists however have evidentially emphasized that labor empowerment has not represented liberation for Black women in the way that it has been emancipating for white women, establishing that these criticisms only reflect the reality of a select group of women (hooks 1981, Collins 2000). Located betwixt multiple power structures, Black women have had to create distinctive strategies, peculiar to their layered oppression, for both their autonomous and community survival. Lola Young argues that expressive elements of survival strategy and wellness may be more evident in the writings and expressive creativity of Black diaspora women (2000, 52). One of such elements this sub-chapter deconstructs is the power dynamics evoked within domestic kitchen spaces in *The Book of Not*, *Homegoing*, *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference*. By de-centering Anglo-European's abstractions of the intrinsic gendered oppression in domestic cooking spaces, and using Black feminist theories to cross-examine my selected novels, I explore the complex changeability of power dynamics present in Black women's domestic kitchen spaces. I advance that for Black female characters, their home kitchen space within the imperial white supremacist capitalist political economies be evoked as a paradoxical site of subjugation and independence, exploitation and empowerment, oppression and resistance, labor and pleasure, hardship and safety, confinement, and liberty, and finally, risk and refuge.

In both *Homegoing* and *The Book of Not*, the character of the power dynamics and distribution bordering Black women's domestic food labor is narrated through precolonial, slave trading, imperial rule, post-slavery, and postcolonial timeframes. In *Homegoing*, the gendered character of the power dynamics in pre-colonial pastoral Gold Coast society (now Ghana) is more formless and collaborative than binary and objective. Food labor is codified around both the private and public space, ultimately blurring and disrupting the distinctions between the masculine public and the feminine private domain underscored by Anglo-European feminists. The women of Fante and Asante villages prepare their foods in outdoor spaces, and the men gather and provide foodstuffs. The men and women congregate to eat, talk, bond, and share pertinent information and responsibilities. The food preparation communicates a much more complex practice that extends beyond delivering the end product of cooked meals. Food preparation encompasses the process of cultivating, harvesting, trading, conserving, fetching water, and cooking. Both boys and girls are tutored in gendered collaborative etiquettes and expected to contribute to the

sustenance and overall wellness of the family and community. Women's essential family responsibilities revolve around nurturing. This they combine with participating in agricultural labor alongside their men with little to no conflict. Activities such as drumming, singing, jostling by men and boys, impassioned war preparations, intra and inter-tribal negotiations and meeting accompany the cooking and eating of foods. Food preparation and consumption is undertaken by women with the objective to nurture and supply their men with physical strength and agility to fight, win and protect their community frontiers. The women are anything but silent, subjugated victims and their domestic responsibilities are handled with tremendous agential capability and power. According to Angela Meah, this was not applicable in the Global North, as women's domestic labor was both severely demarcated and an undervalued and marginalized contribution to the "productive economy in households" (2014, 672).

A conversation between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in *Homegoing* reveals the amorphous distribution of power in the domestic kitchen space and a blurry boundary between private and public. Nana Serwah, the mother-in-law, chides Akua for not participating in the food work.

> Akua, what's wrong with you? Why are you just standing there? Come and help. These men need to be fed before the next meeting [...] The men were shouting loudly, so loudly that it was nearly impossible to distinguish what one was saying from what the others were saying [...] Akua could see her husband, but she did not dare look at him. She knew her place was with her mother-in-law, the other women, the old men, not begging questions of him with her eyes (Gyasi 181–182).

These activities and social interactions that unfold within this publicly situated domestic kitchen not only transcends gendered boundaries, but also enriches women's domestic contribution with value. Additionally, the old men occupying the same space as the women demonstrate that hierarchy is not established exclusively along gender binaries. Women are not isolated under one category and single-axis unit of analysis. According to Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, the degrees of hierarchy existing in pre-colonial African societies is manifested in "socially specific ways between individuals, men and women alike" (2003, 79). This is in consonance with Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's argument that draconian female inferiority was a value-system imported with colonial rule, before which identities were organized along amorphous boundaries like tribe, age, royalty, class, and various relationships to privilege and disadvantage (2006, 2003).

The spatial dynamics of the pre-colonial kitchen in *Homegoing* are characterized by freedom, pleasure, agency and, even more so, class intersection. This is in contrast to the dynamics of the colonial and slavery timeframe, which is fraught with oppression, mandatory labor, abuse, tyranny, non-consensual relations, enslavement, and anti-Black misogynistic prescripts. Abee, only four years old, is narrated as congenially participating in the kitchen. She "liked to hold the giant pestle and pretend that she was helping" and her mother would respond, "You are so strong" (Gyasi 179). Her childlike enthusiasm is applauded, while at the same time limited for her own protection from possible domestic accidents. Esi, the daughter of a renowned warrior of the Asante nation, is pampered and spoiled by her parents. Before her capture by the Fante warriors and auction to the British slave traders, her participation in the kitchen is on a voluntary basis. When her mother refuses to choose a house girl or boy from the war prisoners brought back to the village because Esi helps in the kitchen, her father passionately reinforces her social status with the response "Esi is my daughter, not some common girl to be ordered about" (35). The fundamental fluctuating, unstable identities and blurring of positions, spaces and relational dynamics imbued into the pre-colonial value system is also demonstrated in Maame's sentiment on autonomy. Cautioning her child on the modalities of power and control, she remarks: "Weakness is treating someone as though they belong to you. Strength is knowing that everyone belongs to themselves" (38). Considering the juxtaposition between her previous position as a slave and her current one as the beloved, favorite wife of the best warrior of the Asante nation evinces a potential for "both subversion and disruption [...] and a much more complex and messy relationship between power, different spaces and the (gendered) performance(s) which take place" in pre-colonial pastoral African societies (Meah 2014, 673).

With imperial interruption came new forms of enforced normativity. Social organization along gender and race lines was an integral part of this value-system imported by Europeans. The spatial dynamics of the domestic kitchen and the relational dynamics performed in this previously public domain ultimately becomes altered. This however does not imply that pre-colonial African societies were not patriarchally structured, or that male domination was non-existent. Rather, what a nuanced reflection of the configurations of power within the two geographical spaces reveals is that "women's activities with work and family differed from those they encountered under slavery" (Collins, 2000, 49). In this colonial narrative timeframe, the domestic space in both *Homeland* and *The Book of Not* becomes inscribed with a conflux of

foreign elements and power dynamics. African women are obliged to perform domesticity for white men and white women alongside their own familial responsibilities, negatively impacting their subjectivities and transforming their subtleties of resistance.

In *The Book of Not*, Tambudzai and Ntombizethu, the two of six Black female students conscientiously selected to fill the Rhodesian government's five percent diversity quota, are subjected to the hostility of Black female cooks and cleaners in their white-centered colonial Christian college. On copious occasions, the Black female cooks slam and throw their plates of food at them. However, their behavior is differently pleasant when serving the white classmates. They set the dishes down "smiling gently" (Dangarembga 46, 122, 125). The cooks' display of hostility to Tambu and Ntombi could be interpreted as a constituent of the workings of resistance to their dehumanization and differential treatment under the imperial white supremacist patriarchal system. Situated within intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender impacts their ability to perform resistance from a radical approach. The only counterattack outlet available to them is to further dehumanize the Black girls who are more fortunate than them to be allowed into a white coveted space that is predicated on Black subjugation. This oppression-motivated-reactiveness is regrettably a common trope in marginalized discourse. According to Patricia Hill Collins, it is for this reason of endemic racism amongst others that the term feminism without the adjective "black" is not enough (1996, 13). Collins argues that in the same way the prefix's intent is to disrupt the false universality of advocacy for women's equity and liberty, so also must it model sensitivity to the heterogeneity of existing identities and positionality currently operating within the Black community. Minimizing hierarchical positionalities and intersections of oppression for the sake of collective empowerment would only lead to further division and withdrawal. In this sense, Tambu and Ntombi represent Black girls who are elevated in social class by virtue of the scholarships given to them by the white system. From their class mobility emerges an interesting pattern, which is the exigency to negotiate the oppression-motivated-reactiveness of the Black cooks on top of the commonality of racial oppression. Conversely, the Black cooks' hostility towards Tambu and Ntombi's social mobility is also complicit in the imperial white supremacist system operating collectively against them.

Comparatively with the operation of imperialism on the continent, enslaved Black women translocated to the Americas were also subjected to a new form of exploitation in their relegation to the domestic space, to be controlled

by their white female mistresses. In *Homegoing*, Black women not only had to work alongside Black men on the plantation field, but also in the domestic quarters, putting them in close proximity with white privileged women. Due to the combination of race and gender oppression unfolding within the "slave political economies" (Collins 2000, 52), they combine contributing to their community and family's well-being with also performing labor for their white owners. Just like Tambu's and Ntombi's experiences of antipathy from the Black maids, Ness, the daughter of Esi, suffers a similar fate on the plantation farm. For one unjustifiable reason or the other, the head house slave, Margaret, fills her glass with only a quarter of water claiming inadequacy in water supply, even though the "buckets of water on the porch behind her were enough to last a week" (Gyasi 72). The domestic space is yet again crisscrossed with intersections of white allocated privilege(s) that cause intra-group competition and conflict. Ness, by virtue of her lighter pigmentation, is considered "too pretty for a field nigger" and assigned to work in the domestic quarter of her white owners (72). Margaret, the head house slave suspecting that her status as the favorite house slave might be jeopardized by the new addition, expresses outward relief at Ness's final rejection due to her scarred skin. "It a shame, really. For a second, I's thought you mighta been prettier than me.' She clucked her tongue twice and left the room" (74). Under slavery, the signification of the domestic space and Black women's participation in this space is altered.

The transition to the free labor market during the tumultuous reconstruction period composed of emancipation in the Northern and Jim Crow enforced racial segregation law in the Southern United States also has little to no effect on Black women's fate. In *Homegoing*, Black female slaves' performance of domesticity is narrated as a never-ending responsibility. Notwithstanding their legal freedom, they still have to cook and clean all day with no consideration for their humanity. Anna, a pregnant freed slave and Ma Aku, an aged runaway slave are obligated to work in their delicate conditions. Anna combines cooking and cleaning for her white employers with caring for her own husband and seven children until her due date. Ma Aku cleans through her age-related "never-ending coughs and aches" (Gyasi 112). Ma Aku would clean until her condition deteriorates and Anna until she is "bleary-eyed" and "could no longer walk without waddling because of her enormous belly" (123). Agnes, Anna's daughter, takes a cleaning job immediately she turns sixteen. As the older child, she is the designated home carer for her six siblings. As soon as she begins her job outside the home, Beulah, her younger sister assumes responsibility for the home. This indicates that for Black girls, there is only a short time

for youthful innocence in their identity formation. From a young age, they are compelled to join their mother in contributing to the welfare of the family unit.

In terms of the caring labor of African American women, Collins establishes that Black American women's motivation to seek out jobs in the public domestic work sector was not predicated on any quest for gender equality with their men. During this period, African American men and women continued to suffer racial segregation and economic oppression, so the issue for African American women was "less one of achieving economic parity with their Black male counterparts and more of securing an adequate overall family income" (2000, 53). With their exclusion from the burgeoning part of the market economy, aside from working in the fields with their men, "domestic work constituted the other primary occupation" of their wage labor (54). In fact, it would be hardly surprising if African American women coveted the everyday life of their fellow white women and would prefer to have their responsibilities organized around their familial domestic work, because their double role indicated that they were not "feminine" in the framework of the gender ideology in that period. However, Collins argues that this was not the case. African American women's eagerness to withdraw from the labor force is invested in the sentiment to "remove themselves from the exploited labor force in order to return the value of their labor to their families and to find relief from the sexual harassment they endured in domestic service" (54). For Black American women, domestic service in this context signified exploitation, subordination and powerlessness, and the wherewithal to replace their public domestic labor with just their own home duties was eagerly desired.

This powerlessness and subordination infused into the domestic space in white supremacist capitalist political economies is affectively captured in *Homegoing*. Wille, the granddaughter of Anna, is sexually violated while performing her domestic wage labor in the public sphere. Her disenfranchised husband is ordered by two white men to perform sexual acts on her for their amusement. White people routinely violate Black families' privacy, and Black women are mostly at the receiving ends of such violations. This sexual violation amongst many other anti-Black misogynistic behaviors they have had to negotiate in the past finally leads to the traumatic end of Willie's marriage. Left with a child to care for on only the wages of her domestic labor, her living condition deteriorates. She is sacked from several jobs because of her inability to get private childcare for her child. Bringing a child to work under this capitalist political economy is unacceptable because she is considered a paid worker. For most Black American women, the choice of prioritizing their

family unit, and being a wife and mother is simply an imaginary idea, way out of their reach as the novel suggests.

In African countries, where prior to colonialism African women "routinely combined childcare with their contributions to precapitalist political economies", I argue that the gender system also undergoes a transformation under colonialism (2000, 5). Middle-class Black women as represented in the novels, would come to consider prioritizing familial domestic duties as a form of privilege as well as an act of resistance against the white oppressive system that is built on the dehumanization of their Black men. In *The Book of Not*, Maiguru, a middle-class British educated African woman suffers a stretch of anxiety for her husband's welfare under a heavily embattled Rhodesia. Her husband, Babamukuru is also a British-educated African man who returns home to become the head teacher at a mission school. During the Zimbabwean war of liberation between the Big brothers, who want to reclaim expropriated lands, and the Rhodesians (signifier for British interlopers), a six o' clock curfew is imposed on the towns, affecting Babamukuru's work ethics. Maiguru and her daughters are narrated as "peeping cautiously out of various windows, peering for long squinting moments without bothering to exhale", waiting anxiously for the safe return of their husband and father back to the mission house (81). On several occasions, she expresses her frustration at their powerlessness, as well as her husband's insistence on defying the curfew. She regards her domestic responsibility positively, using it to express material comfort, warmth, and love to her nuclear family. She has a housemaid who assists her in her domestic duties yet considers her being a wife and mother her primary responsibility. She has a garden, which she tends to fondly.

Maiguru's labor is in the purview of her domestic service to her family, and she is narrated as pouring so much love into the earth as if it belongs to her. In return, her garden blossoms and "produces prodigiously" to the envy of other under-privileged African women (181). Taken by amazement at the fertility of her garden, other women express their desire to obtain their independence from the British rule and advance the economic condition of their family and community; "soon, every woman will have a patch like that! For her to work with the strength of her hands! After the war, everyone will have something. That's what the elder siblings are promising" (182). Immediately Babamukuru arrives at the house, Maiguru starts dishing food for the whole family. Very much attuned to her husband's needs, she positively regards her domestic duties, constantly praising God "for providing and at the same time bringing Babamukuru whole, down the mission road" (85). On a few occasions, she uses

her domestic responsibility to relieve her daughters and husband of external white supremacist pressures. When Tambu receives a negative assessment on her report card, Maiguru promptly attempts to alleviate both father's anger and daughter's pain with food.

> But she does have the three A-Levels, Baba!' Maiguru tried to soothe him by placing several large joints of chicken on her husband's plate. 'Have some, Daddy-dear!' she lilted on the brink of baby talk in her effort to keep peace at the table. 'I thought since Sisi Tambu has passed, we should celebrate with something delicious.' She turned to me and offered the plate. 'Most people only take three subjects, you know! Of course, Sisi Tambu, you're just as good! (185).

When Babamukuru would not relent in chiding Tambu, Tambu looks to her for help but all Mai does is offer them more food. This action of recurrently offering her home-prepared dishes can be interpreted as an act of resistance to the violent force of imperial white supremacist dynamics that continually tries to upset the wellbeing of her family. In the framework of the intersection of oppressions she has to organize her identity, work, and family around, her domestic labor is rather empowering and valuable, because it is focused on nurturing and keeping her family together in the face of their subjugation to colonial power. For Maiguru, her familial domestic service is not a manifestation of her inferiority and subjugation. Alternately, this private space serves as protection against the violence of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist political economies that brutalize, humiliate, and exploit Black women. So rather than conceive of her domestic labor as a form of exploitation by her husband, she is aware of her privilege and grateful for the provisional opportunity to be able to nurture her family in the way other African women desire.

The end of colonialism saw previously colonized countries bedeviled with conflicting value systems. Returning to how things were is an impossible task and going forward is also plagued with colonial constructions of racial and gendered ideologies. In postcolonial Nigeria, the kitchen space as chronicled in *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* is entangled in layers of material and symbolic power dynamics. A flexibility in the way the Black female characters interact with the colonial-instituted private domestic space emerges. Crisscrossed with multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage, the kitchen space in postcolonial patriarchal Nigerian setting attains a concurrent signification of subjugation, risk, agency, pleasure, and survival. In *A Bit of Difference*, principally, the

narrator assumes a critical stance, painting the picture of postcolonial Nigerian girls with the brush of subservience and servitude, and describing them as "essentially housewives-in-training" (Atta 37). They are raised to be dexterous in their cooking repertoire. Anything less is unacceptable and considered uncultured. Conversely, the upper- and middle-class Nigerian women are portrayed to have a different attachment to their domestic space and responsibilities. All or a majority of them have housemaids and cooks at their disposal. Deola's mum has a housemaid at her disposal who does errands around the house. The housemaid's duties entail sometimes cooking, serving the food, cleaning and generally providing domestic services to the entire household. Deola, who has lived in the United Kingdom for an extended number of years, expresses shame at her childhood dependence on her parents' house-helps for "everyday inconveniences" (81). It suffices to surmise that her additional migrant identity is the source of her newly acquired embarrassment.

In postcolonial Nigeria absent of visible racial markers, the domestic space acquires new or additional meanings. Since power is no longer racially distributed, African women can act as an authority on the interpretation of food work, as well as negotiate their relationship with this private domestic space. Eno, Deola's sister-in-law, delivers a pot of Native soup, prepared by her cook, to her father-in-law. Her father-in-law dramatically dances and sings around the dining table, even though he knows she cannot personally cook and definitely did not prepare the soup. Eno's lack of or disinterest in domestic labor is not represented as problematic to either her husband or her father-in-law. For these women, their gendered obligation within their domestic spaces is used as mechanisms of survival. Deola's mother is described as skilled at getting whatever she wants from her husband. She first feeds him and right after tenders her demands. In this regard, she uses food as a mechanism to subdue and placate, affording her agency and power which may yet be contemptible to an outside observer.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's Aunt Uju carries on a relationship with a married General. In an economically ailing Nigeria, Aunt Uju is able to use the domestic space as a survival tool. Unable to get a job after graduating with a degree in medical studies, she gets involved with a rich politician who commits to providing all her needs. She luxuriates in her brand-new lifestyle, combining reading with cooking for the General on his infrequent visits. Her appropriation of the kitchen space supplies her with the required tool to transcend and circumvent both heteronormative patriarchy and an "ass-licking economy" (Adichie 93). On a few occasions, she is able to assist her

family with financial support by paying off a year's worth of house rent among other things. Like Maiguru and Deola's mother, she has a housemaid and considers herself fortunate "to be licking the right ass" (93). For Aunt Uju, her retention and translation of the domestic space empowers her with a degree of freedom, social currency, and financial security. One can argue that even though there is an undertone of female subordination in the entirety of the postcolonial social structure, African women as portrayed in the literary texts transgress the system in their own unique ways and habitually manipulate it to their own benefit. For these women, their relationship with their domestic kitchen spaces opens up endless possibilities, ranging from the expression of resistance to acts of nurturing.

African female migrants, who arrive to Europe and the US with diverse cultural backgrounds and yet must deal with the construction of Black femaleness as typified by their subjecthood, quickly realize that a certain amount of self-determination and self-definition that excludes them in the public space is guaranteed within their domestic space. With their new identities and spatial dynamics, their domestic space will also come to undergo transformations and acquire new significations. In *Americanah*, Ojuigo and Aunt Uju's relocation to the UK and the US respectively alter their identities and shift their gendered boundaries contrastingly. While they both previously operate from dissimilar social positions back in Nigeria, they both come to share similar desires and aspirations in their host countries. They both desire to experience belonging and alliance. Ojuigo, previously portrayed as an insubordinate, nonconforming and intelligent university student, undergoes a contrasting transformation to her social identity in the UK. In the UK, she is characterized as a demure and subservient wife, who answers "Yes, Nicholas" to almost every of her husband's requests (Adichie 296). We come to understand the reason for this alteration in her gender performance. While her citizenship was realized through her postgraduate student status, her husband was for many years undocumented. For Ojuigo, her domestic labor is altered by the intersection of marriage and the public space (UK), and her acquisition of power through the domestic space is an exemplification of committed support to her husband's immigrant struggles. Cooking, serving his food, supervising the needs of the children, raising well-assimilated children, and generally exclusively performing housewife duties is her own way of renegotiating status, positionalities, liberation, and power in a racially oppressive system.

Aunt Uju's relocation to the US with her infant, in order to escape the wrath of General's legal wife, is not without hurdles. She experiences profes-

sional failure, racial discrimination, and poverty, and must learn to navigate this white supremacist society differently as a racially subjugated and ethnic Other. After multiple attempts at writing the medical licensing examination, she gains certification, but is confronted with racism from patients at her workplace. Finding a way to cope with her experiences of degradation and alienation, she premeditatively chooses to form a relationship with Bartholomew, a US-based Nigerian man. One of her paramount reasons for choosing to pursue a relationship with Bartholomew is their ethnic affiliation. On his first visit to her place, she cooks "peppered gizzard", delighting in his comments on her cooking and her possibility of being a good wife and cook (141). She derives so much joy in the performance of domesticity, slipping smoothly into her light-hearted habit, "lunging to pick up his fork when it slipped from his hand" and "smiling a smile that promised to be demure to him but not the world" (142). Choosing a partner based on national, ethnic, and racial commonality, and sliding into the habit of performing domesticity is her way to re-establish some cultural familiarity, counter her hyper-visibility, and restore the love and warmth that is denied her in the US public space. The relationship fails due to a number of reasons, topmost of which is Bartholomew's reductionistic and universalist conceptions of gender dynamics. Complaining bitterly to Ifemelu, Aunt Uju expresses the intersectionality that is lacking in Bartholomew's gender performance:

> Both of us work. Both of us come home at the same time and do you know what Bartholomew does? He just sits in the living room and turns on the TV and asks me what we are eating for dinner [...] He wants me to give him my salary. Imagine! He said that is how marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money home to Brother without his permission, that we should make his car payments from my salary [...] All he wants is for me to hand over my salary to him and cook peppered gizzard for him on Saturdays while he watches European League on satellite. Why should I give him my salary? Did he pay my fees in medical school? [...] Everything is money, money, money. He keeps wanting to make my work decisions for me. What does an accountant know about medicine? I just want to be comfortable. I just want to be able to pay for my child's college. I don't need to work longer hours just to accumulate money. It's not as if I'm planning to buy a boat like Americans (269–271).

From this extract, it is clear that Aunt Uju's interpretation of her domesticity as a form of drudgery and exploitation is within the specific context of the US's

"social and structural conditions" (Meah 2014, 680). Bartholomew's contradictory behavior predicated on both white-centric and Afrocentric gendered ideologies is unscrupulous and profiteering only for him. Aunt Uju interprets his unwillingness to perform tasks that previously had been delineated as women's responsibilities, while at the same time obligating her to participate in waged public labor, as a form of gender asymmetry. Since subjectivities are products of social spaces, I argue that the gendered social conditions Aunt Uju must conform to in the US engenders an extension to her conceptualization and embodiment of masculine and feminine subjectivities.

Based on my analysis of events focalized in the four novels, it is no exaggeration to argue that Black women's negotiation of the kitchen space shows nuance beyond the monological crippling discourse of subjugation, silence and denigration prominently represented in Anglo-European discourse on gender oppression and the kitchen as a symbol of ubiquitous patriarchal social arrangement.

5. Postcolonial Continuities: Black Women's Positionality in the Global Economy

In interrogating the permissible humiliations and anti-Black violence inflicted on Black women in the contemporary global order, this chapter tackles and overlaps prominent discursive geopolitical landscapes and international institutions around which humiliations of Black women, have become normalized and acceptable. As the world becomes even more transnational and borders are erected, enforced, and simultaneously dismantled and expanded, not least as a result of late twentieth and twenty-first centuries' increased migration flows and direct and indirect acts of Western internationalism, the topics of citizenship, immigration and humanitarian narratives have become even more relevant to the discourse of global belonging and sociopolitical participation. Rather than interrogate these discourses separately as is done; considering the vastness of their frameworks and engagements gathered from myriad of geopolitical academic disciplines (see for example, Okolo 2019, Mai 2016, Davidson 2006, Kempadoo 2015, Bastida-Rodriguez 2014, Unigwe 2008, Ladele & Omotayo 2017, Butler 20089, Russell, Balibar 2001), I explore them en bloc at their points of convergence with "geopolitical hierarchies" (Butler 2008) and Moya Bailey's concept of misogynoir, which both remain crucial to Black feminist self-reflexive engagements with collectivities of (dis)empowered and (de)humanized subjectivities.

The central focus of this chapter is how four (4) of my selected novels, *On Black Sisters' Street*, *We Need New Names*, *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah* narrativize the polarizing topics of immigration, citizenship, and humanitarian crisis with regard to how women of African descent distinctively experience them even as they are amenable to (post)colonial and (trans)national capriciousness. By engaging with the constellation of social and political identities of characters and realities narrativized in the novels, I consider what these macro socio-political tropes mean for African and African descended women, who are

simultaneously gendered and racialized. By using Black feminist empowering frameworks to engage these constellations of Black female characters represented in my selected novels, I hope to extract the myriads of subjectivities, spectrum of contemporary realities and ambiguity of agencies that reflect the discursive terrain of identity and avoid the one-dimensional disenfranchised representation of previously colonized and historically oppressed subjects that is typical of Western dominant scholarships.

5.1 Permissible Humiliations and Anti-Black Violence: Immigration, Citizenship, and Humanitarian Crisis

In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, which dedicates its entire pages to narrating the lives of four African migrant sex workers in Antwerp, Belgium, my analysis centers around the gendered dynamics of global migration for economic survival, the tension between disenfranchisement and agency as controlled by European and white-centered tropes of solidarity, the regime of epistemological and structural powers that define and legitimize the frontiers of belonging and citizenship, and the carcerality of existing at the intersection of Blackness, unlawful non-citizenry, and sex work that is barely humanized and only legitimized under controlled conditions. Within the present context of a global economy that is reflective of the 21st century processes of profound social, cultural, political, and economic interaction and integration, Martina Vitackova (2019) and Patricia Bastida-Rodriguez (2014) both contend that stories of commercial sex work and sex trafficking as products of imperialism and global capitalism have been largely neglected in Anglophone and Afro-European fiction of migration and subjectivities. This I argue is due to a number of reasons, such as the entrenched masculinization of historical events of violence suffered by the African continent and the pervasive moralization of women in the questions of human rights and agency engendered by colonial patriarchal structures. However, with the growing appearance of women writers on the contemporary literary scene of the "continent and other diasporic locations", the arrangement of spaces, social categorizations and material conditions as negotiated and experienced by African women continue to undergo re-imagination (Ladele and Omotayo 2017, 53). Unigwe is one of such prolific Afro diasporic writers, who has acknowledged in a series of interviews that her creative interests span writing the subjectivities of African and migrant women who

are most often subjected to omission and misrepresentations in dominant narratives (see Reinares 2020, Bekers 2015, Tunca, Mortimer and Calzo 2013).

The opening scene of Unigwe's novel, which hints at an absolute transition from life to death of who the reader will finally come to identify as the protagonist, will become pivotal to the plot development around the material conditions of the intersection of undocumented migration and sex work that informs four Black female migrant characters' participation and well-being in their host country of Belgium. This trope of violent murder, on account of its plot metamorphosis will be analyzed through Diana Russell's theorization of femicide. Russell's theorization of femicide encompasses the misogynistic killings of women and girls by men that is motivated by an established hetero-patriarchal sense of ownership. Important to my analysis of the protagonist's murder in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* are the further intersectional contributions that have been made to expand this theory to include the heterogeneity of power structures, not limited to hetero-patriarchy, that inform the killings of Black women (see Radford 1992, Consuelo et al 2016, Grant 1992, Southhall Black Sisters 1992, Crenshaw 1995). According to Russell, femicide, informed by sexist social values and laws, is the ultimate fatality on the hierarchy of sexual violence, and it is this undergirding of sexism-cum-murder that necessitates a naming distinctive from a gender-neutral term like homicide (2011). Reading *On Black Sisters' Street* through Russell's pioneering work and the intersectional contributions gives me the vocabulary to name Sisi's murder as femicide on account of the heterogeneous power structures that underpin such fatal violence.

After consenting to being trafficked to Belgium by a Lagos-based pimp, to whom Sisi must pay a huge amount of money in thousands of euros, the repercussion of her non-undocumented legal status and the exploitative working conditions she meets becomes too much for her apropos of the amount of suffering she is willing to endure. Sisi's desire to escape is momentarily stopped by the recollection of the pimp's threat of violence, so she contents herself with metaphorically escaping her life in the cramped shared flat she shares with Efe, Ama, and Joyce, and the booth on Vingerlingstraat where they display their bodies for commercial sex activities. Sisi's metaphorical escape includes exploring the city and stores in Antwerp under various pseudonyms and coaxing interactions with people through constructed positively oriented identities that garner her better and fairer treatments than her social status as an undocumented immigrant and sex worker. For a chance at a humane reciprocation, she learns to appropriate different types of "urban identities"

(Bastida-Rodriguez 2014, 207), like becoming a pregnant foreigner from La-
gos, a rich American tourist travelling around Europe, an excited polite tourist
with no knowledge of the Dutch language, soliciting for her photos to be taken,
a fiancee to a rich businessman who is too busy to physically participate in
their pre-wedding shopping activities, a wealthy professional single woman
etc. Aside from these enthusiastic appropriations, she also mirrors other
peoples' behaviors, like "delicately dabbing her own eyes with a paper tissue"
(Unigwe 256) just like the sentimental shop assistant and aiming "her camera
at paintings she found uninteresting and vulgar" whilst trading "conspiratorial
smiles" with other tourists (258).

The sum of these appropriations reflects Sisi's earnest desire, which is to
escape her socially stigmatized identity that is mediated by power relations
beyond her control. In her elaborate melodramatic performances that attract
myriads of positive and gratuitous reactions in the city, we see an endeavor
to subvert the distress of simultaneous invisibility engendered by her undocu-
mented status and hypervisibility because of her sex work. As observed of her
character as an undocumented Black sex worker, she feels compelled to behave
in the manner conceived of trafficked sexed bodies that she finds very disen-
franchising. They [sex workers] are expected to stand in booths, and plaster
"porcelain smiles" on their faces that signal their employment of offering sex
for money (252). Any perception of disobedience is punished by a withdrawal
of the protection of the booth as repercussion, whereupon they are forced to
have sex with men in bar room toilets or dingy hotels. Indeed, Madam's shrewd
declaration of Sisi as a "persona non grata" (182) in Belgium following her re-
hearsed story of victimhood and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' confirmation
of asylum rejection, foretells the lack of state protection and agency Black traf-
ficked sexed bodies are anticipated to have, also revealing how pimps and sex
traffickers use the "restrictive migration policies" and associated legitimized
humanitarian institutional interventions of the West to (re)produce "undesir-
able" migrants (Mai 2016, 3). This is personified by Sisi's eventual rape by her
first client in the toilet cubicle of a bar. Even after she repeatedly screams that
she had changed her mind: "I don't need this. Stop!", it only further stokes the
white client's sexual lust, affirming the disposability of her status (Unigwe 212).

In view of this simultaneous strain of invisibility and hypervisibility, Sisi's
simultaneous concealing of her identity as an undocumented African migrant
sex worker, and performance of dignified and legitimized identities conveys
her paramount desire, which is to be seen and accepted as a legitimate and
protected part of the city. She contents herself with these frequent imperson-

ations until she begins a romantic relationship with Luc, a white-Belgian man who she meets in an African Pentecostal church. The metamorphosis of their relationship provokes continuous persuasion on his part for her to resign from her job as a sex worker. Every attempt of Sisi at explaining the terms of her bounded exploitation—that she could only leave on the grounds that she pays off her debt—is met with his simplistic solution of involving the police. Sisi, on the other hand is hyper-conscious of the consequences of involving the police—that she not only risks being deported, but she also jeopardizes the other women's stay in Belgium and possibility of achieving their individual dreams. Nevertheless, Luc's persistent persuasion manages to reawaken her sentient longing for visibility, revealing to her that impersonating socially acceptable identities is only a Band-Aid for her suffering. She finally brings this desire into fruition by escaping to his house. It is this attempt at escape that is met with her murder by Dele's henchman, Segun. Sisi's murder, Madam's indifference, the police's run-of-the-mill investigation, and the women's inability to name their systemic violence, bring the women into an awareness of their disenfranchisement. If they did not give a thought to their invisible state before, Sisi's murder finally puts that fact on display. Thus, we can argue that Sisi's tragic death is instigated by her desire to (re)claim a status of visibility that is unavailable to women in her position, and facilitated by Luc's inability to recognize the heterogeneity of power structures that institutes her condition of vulnerability.

For the purpose of my work, which is rooted in Black feminist frameworks, it is important to note that the current global feminist debate on sex work condemns the reductionist perception of sex work as sexual violence against women and of sex workers as helpless victims exploited by patriarchy. Feminist works alternatively advocate for nuanced analysis that identify the forms of oppression often steeped in white supremacist patriarchal capitalist structures, which underpin the working conditions of the global sex industry as with every other profession (see Kempadoo 2015, Mai 2016). Using this empowering feminist framework without the recommended nuanced appraisal in the analysis of the novel could bring us to the hasty conclusion that three of the four women—Sisi, Efe and Ama are not victims due to their consent to be trafficked. Only through a deconstruction of the power structures that underpins their entry into the European sex-work market, their experiences of invisibility in Antwerp, and the murder of Sisi can we begin to understand the "agency and vulnerability of migrants working in the global sex industry" (Mai 2016, 10).

Ifeyinwa Genevieve Okolo highlights similar complexities around the discourse of agency represented in the novel, and the appearance of deliberateness on the part of Unigwe to provoke these "questions from many conflicting, even contradictory, angles" (2019, 116). According to Okolo, even though the trope of victimized, sexualized and exoticized Black women for the European market—a postcolonial extension of the history of colonialism and slavery—is very disturbingly familiar, Unigwe's narration of the women's subjectivities in relation to the converging and diverging systemic borders of their home countries and host countries elucidate "the complicated expression of black agency" in this contemporary period (2019, 117). As an African immigrant woman writer in Belgium, Unigwe is familiar with the out of place feeling racialized bodies contend with in Europe. In one of her interviews, she remarks on the homogeneity of the Belgian national identity despite the backdrop of post-migration and increasing diversity, wherein whiteness still continues to be the deciding factor of national belonging (Unigwe 2015). Being Black in Europe regardless of your generational identity means becoming accustomed to sweeping generalization that accompany the strain of anti-Blackness. It is this commonality of experience I argue that connects Unigwe imaginatively to sex-trafficked African female immigrants and induces her creative attempt to narrate their subjectivities through defining moments that place them in the center of their precarity in order to name their priorities on their own terms.

Bastida-Rodriguez argues that despite the legal status of sex work in Belgium, the restrictive condition placed on sex-workers' incorporation into the public sphere, the socio-culture of collective disgust expressed towards the profession, coupled with the invisibility of being undocumented African female immigrants translates into ostracism of the protagonists in everyday urban life (2014). As soon as the African women arrive in Belgium, they discover that they have no claim to citizenship, which translates to several dire implications, such as exclusion from citizenship protection and sociocultural belonging. The women's ostracism is particularly articulated in Segun's conceited smile followed by his offer to drive Sisi home after he finds her in the city on one of her frequent impersonations. Sisi is described as disconcerted by this chance encounter and accepts the offer to be driven back home. Even though she is not doing anything particularly wrong, it can be interpreted from the verbal and non-verbal expressions shared in this short exchange that there is an expectation that the women's participation in urban life be limited to their living quarters and allocated work district. Before their arrival in Belgium, there is a similar pattern in their enthusiasms, which is

the assumption that the conditions of their work and migrant life would be better, or at least tolerable enough for them to empower themselves socially and economically. This shows that their original consent to work in the global sex industry was not assessed through the lens of victimization. It was simply a means for them to alleviate their precarious conditions. Sisi is described as grateful to Dele—a symbol of male hegemony and tool of imperial white supremacy—for blessing her with the opportunity of a better future. Efe considers the destination worth her cultural disapproval of the profession, and Ama contemplates commercial sex work as a way to regain ownership over her body. That they consent to travel to sell sex in Belgium does not mean that they consent to the myriads of practices deployed to disenfranchise them and strip them of civic protection. Little did they know that their ostracism from Antwerp's public life and social support was set in motion the moment they accepted the offer to work in Western European sex industries.

Judith Butler and Kamala Kempadoo contend that the discourse of sexual politics freedom is framed around the hegemony of the West and interest of white supremacy, which ironically but not surprisingly, operates as state coercive mechanisms to exploit, control, and disenfranchise racialized societies and racialized immigrant communities in the European and North American diaspora (2008, 2015). For these African female migrant characters trafficked into the European sex industry, the guarantee of civic protection is virtually non-existent. They are simply replaceable pawns in the European sex industry as evidenced by Sisi's murder, the complicity of the Belgian police, and Dele's ensuing self-flattery about having other women already lined up in Lagos to take her place: "Na good worker we lose but gals full *boku* for Lagos. I get three lined up. Latest next week, dem visa go ready. Dem full for front, full for back. I swear, dem go drive oyibo mad" (Unigwe 205). In the pimp's boastfulness, we see that the violence is not implicated in the women's choices to be commercial sex workers for survival, but in the established asymmetrical relations of power that reinforces the exploitation of a group of disposable people.

Kamala Kempadoo, in her analysis of the trends in contemporary anti-trafficking and anti-slavery debates, names these overlapping organizing structures as white supremacy, contemporary neoliberalism and global capitalism (2015). What follows is an in-depth analysis of how these three structures interact together in the global sex industry to exploit people from racialized societies to satisfy consumer sexual demands, which has emerged in the wake of the dominant West's sexual politics. In summary, Kempadoo maintains that the world order as we have it today is organized around a

system of white supremacy that is an expression of its entanglement with a neo-liberal political economy, which upholds Western capitalist hegemonic values, defends the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, assimilates racialized subjects into becoming complicit in their own exploitation, introduces tighter systemic laws and policies that punish ostensible deviants of this global world order and finally generates an orthodoxy, in the form of white-centered philanthropy to address the very conditions of exploitation that it produces (2015). When brought into conversation with Sisi's, Efe's, Ama's and Joyce's migrant subjectivities in Antwerp, the heterogeneity of structures—not exclusive to hetero-patriarchy—that mediate their migrant project of belonging, sociopolitical participation and economic liberational endeavor becomes apparent. These structures, all entangled with and products of white supremacy, I argue, first ascertain the women's vulnerable status in their home countries, before carrying out the project of exploitation. In this sense, their vulnerability is entangled with their erstwhile exploitation in their home country and ensuing systemic disenfranchisement in their host country, allowing for the unleashing of even more violence on them. Thus, their disposability is guaranteed even before their venture into the sex industry, and the slightest revolt would be met with a reaction that establishes the fact of their replaceability, because the condition of their replaceability is what makes them profitable under an "imperialist racist patriarchal" system (hooks 1981, 104).

Under this entangled system that feeds directly into white supremacy, Dele, the male pimp in Nigeria, Madam, their custodian in Antwerp, the ministry of foreign affairs, Luc, and the Belgian police establishment, deliberately or otherwise, all work in tandem to exploit and harm underprivileged feminized Black bodies—the group most susceptible to exploitation under a neoliberal capitalist world order, due to the inseparable racist and sexist dimension of their oppression (hooks 1981). According to Ladele and Omotayo, Dele and Segun "are both male characters who lend credence to male-hegemony and patriarchy" (2017, 56). I additionally posit that Dele, as a symbol of patriarchy, also works in tandem with an imperial white supremacist neoliberal capitalist world order to exploit gendered dynamics of survival, agency, and empowerment. Amidst their myriads of subjectivities, the consistency in the women's happenstance with Dele attests to the "widespread tendency, across places and cultures, to devalue exploitable female lives" (Okolo 2019, 119). For instance, Sisi meets him at a hairdressing salon on the street of Lagos, where he brings a teenage girl to perm her hair in preparation for her travel to

Spain. When Sisi asks the girl about the purpose of the travel, he immediately halts the conversation, offering her a similar chance. Another character, Efe, works for him as a cleaner for seven months, after which he also offers her a similar package to better her and her son's life. For Ama, he is a frequent generous customer at the restaurant in Lagos where she works. The last character, Joyce (a refugee of Sudanese origin), her going to Europe is represented as the outcome of a pragmatic decision reached between him and her Nigerian soldier boyfriend who wanted to be rid of her in a gracious manner. When we look at Dele's ostensible philanthropic offering, we see that the women's marketable sex appeal to European clients is vital to his benevolence, signaling exploitative relationships that reach way back to Europe's colonization of Africa. After his appraisal and confirmation of their exploitable status, what follows is their objectification that signals a mobilization of Europe's "preferred signifiers of raced and sexualized female embodiment" for his own patriarchally-driven economic advancement (Okolo 2019, 117).

Also, his sexual assault of Ama as payback for her earlier rejection, substitution of Joyce for Alek because the latter conveys feminine submission to potential white male clients, and his angry outburst at any woman who he deems not grateful enough for his benevolence, signals a sexist socialization of women "as objects with no human value or worth" that is endemic to hetero-patriarchy (hooks 1981, 101). This level of contempt expressed towards these African women for their refusal to assume submissive roles, exposes the misogynoir upon which the Europe-Africa transactional sex industry rests. The group of [racialized] women being exploited additionally reveals the continuity of colonial unequal power relations and its rearrangement to reflect the "story of a progressive modernity" (Butler 2008, 2). This affirms bell hook's argument that in the sweeping imperialist racist patriarchal system, Black women withstand the worst of patriarchal violence. Just as Black men can be victimized by racism, they may at the same time act as sexist oppressors of Black women for the furtherance of patriarchal power and privilege. This devaluation portends dire consequences for Black women, and one of them is their exclusion from social, cultural, and constitutional protection (1981).

Additionally, Unigwe uses the character of Madam and her trafficking role in the global sex industry to expose the structures of hegemony, such as those highlighted by Kempadoo. Madam is described as an educated Nigerian female migrant, with a master's degree in business administration. She also speaks perfect English, Dutch and is taking lessons in French. Her accent is described as sophisticated and analogous to the "Queen's English" (Unigwe 117). Upon

meeting with Madam after her arrival to the house on Zwartezusterstraat, Sisi is confounded with surprise at this social standing. Sisi had, prior to meeting her, imagined her to be uneducated and unrefined like Dele. Unigwe's representation of Madam as enlightened further highlights the network of agency and power relations that encircles the global sex industry. Madam immediately seizes Sisi's passport and provides her with a fabricated and embellished story to tell the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The passport is collateral for their contractual debts. The women are expected to pay a weekly sum of five hundred and fifty euros for their use of the booth in addition to the money owed Dele. The image of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an instrument of white supremacy that governs the affairs of migrant belonging and right to civic protection. The building itself described as a gated neolithic castle, with a queue of people "huddled in their jackets […] a few with suitcases, many more with huge travellers' bags" waiting to be admitted, evinces hostile European migration policies (172).

Sisi is coached by Madam to present herself as Mary Featherwill, a daughter of a local Mandigo chief in Liberia, whose entire family was wiped out by soldiers loyal to Charles Taylor. When Sisi asks why she needs to tell this ostensibly false story, Madam's scornful response that she is to "be seen, not heard", demonstrates the invisibility and submission expected of sex trafficked African female migrants (120). Most importantly, Madam's directive of how Sisi should tell this story shows a shrewd understanding of the systems of dominance and its negotiation for racial-gendered exploitation. Sisi is instructed to cry and tear her hair out, because white people are enthralled by these stereotypical stories of suffering and inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa. The relevance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Unigwe's narrative for the disenfranchised and exploitable condition of sex trafficked African female migrants is underlined when Sisi returns with the news that she was denied asylum and mandated to leave in three days. Madam's response "All you need to know is that you're a persona non grata in this country. You do not exist. Not here […] Now you belong to me" exposes her maneuvering of the white supremacist neoliberal system to secure the women's powerlessness (182).

The location of Madam's macabre story in the narrative border of Black violence versus white altruism lends credence to the trope of white humanitarianism that rests upon the "structuring of the interests of white-dominated societies as superior to others" (Kempadoo 2015, 13). The implausibility of the stories handed down to Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce by Madam makes certain that the sex trafficked African migrant women would be denied civic protection, on

account of the fact that their stories do not comply with standardized humanitarian scripts of victimhood, which requires the discharging of Western interventionist protocols. The implication of this is that even though the novel stays true to narrating the subjectivities of these women as evidenced by the differing shape the women's lives follow after the death of Sisi; with Efe becoming a Madam, Joyce starting a school for girls and Ama opening a boutique in Lagos, the sovereignty of the structures of dominance over their lives is impossible to miss. The message is very clear—the success of the sex trafficked African women's migration project is contingent on their cooperation with their exploitation and disenfranchisement under a white supremacist global capitalist system. Indeed, while the leading players in the novel's intercontinental sex trade are represented as Africans, and the authority of white men is diminished and nondescript (Okolo 2019), I posit that the African key players are individuals by whose participations the greater system of neocolonial power is sustained. Indeed, the ultimate accomplishment of a neocolonial global capitalist system is its ability to assimilate racialized subjects into participating in their own exploitation for personal gain (Kempadoo 2015).

This carcerality of existing at the intersection of Blackness and sex worker in the "novel's transactional economy" (Okolo 2019, 118) is also evoked at the socio-spatial level in Antwerp, where sex workers must conduct their business. On Sisi's first day at the job, Madam reveals that the conditional legitimacy of their job, as reflected in the women's isolation to their booths on Vingerlingstraat, "a street in Antwerp's red-light district where window shopping for prostitutes has become an accepted ritual for local males and tourists" (Bastida-Rodriguez 2014, 205), is even additionally stratified with Black female sex workers occupying the not so enviable place in the hierarchy.

> They passed by a big building with its name lit up in neon red, the silhouette of a woman with long, long legs sitting atop one of the letters. There was something arrogant about the building. Madam noticed Sisi looking at it and said wistfully, 'Villa Tinto. The queen of all brothels. Even has its own police station. It just opened a few months ago. January or February, I think it was. It used to be a warehouse before it was converted. Cost a lot for the conversion. It had to. It's a paradise inside, all hi-tech. Designed by some celebrity architect. I hear the girls who work inside have panic buttons beside their beds, to press when a customer gets out of hand. They have jacuzzis. Saunas. That kind of thing. Too costly for us. Not too many Black women inside either. Two. Three, tops. This is where ministers get their girls from! The girls here

are top class. We are going to the Thee Potje. No ministers there, but paying customers all the same (Unigwe 204).

Unigwe's depiction of this additional layer of Othering experienced by her female characters in Antwerp demonstrates that their ostracism is additionally rooted in a historical anti-Black system. That only a minute number of Black women have access to this space where the safety of sex workers is paramount, shows that under global capitalism, Black women by virtue of their race, class and gender are excluded from any advantages that modernity brings. This exclusion of Black female sex workers from the rubric of civic safety generated from progressive sexual politics in *On Black Sisters' Street* can also be read in light of bell hooks's postulation that one of the sociopolitical impacts of the mass sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery is the continued devaluation of Black womanhood, which has "not altered in the course of hundreds of years" (1981, 53).

Fundamentally, Unigwe's depiction of the motif of racialized capitalism effected on these women in present day Antwerp successfully exposes the structures and dynamics that lead back to the network of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and the institutionalization of racial superiority. To some degree, the African women recruited into the global sex industry in *On Black Sisters' Street* are already exposed to structural gendered violence, successfully preparing their bodies to occupy Europe's borders and carry the burden of "conflicting demands of exoticism and subjection, refusal and yet open access" (Okolo 2019, 121). All the women except for Sisi have experienced different forms of sexual violence. These forms of sexual violence enacted on their bodies have shifted them into a state of powerlessness. At age sixteen, Efe is taken advantage of and impregnated by Titus, a forty-year-old rich man, after which he abandons her. Ama is repeatedly raped by her stepfather, from the age of eight to thirteen, when her period starts. And Joyce, the only woman recruited into the global sex trade in a disingenuous manner, is the lone survivor of genocide. Her parents and younger brother are executed in their home as part of an ethnic cleansing of the Dinka population in the predominantly Dinka town. She is viciously gang raped by the militia, with accompanying expletives like "Stupid African slave" and "bitch", after which she is left to die (Unigwe 190). While these women's contexts offer an opportunity to think about the overlap in the organizing structures that compromise the state of enfranchisement for Black women, the context of Joyce in particular is used by the author to amplify the structure of anti-Black misogyny that is part of the social infrastructure

of postcolonial countries. Regardless of the women's strife for survival, which is especially indicated in their creative circumnavigation of the fatality of the structures pressing on their lives, they are already engendered as the group most vulnerable to systemic violence, exploitation, injustice, and disenfranchisement, and can only work towards reducing the harm.

Largely, the mechanisms of imperial white supremacy, neoliberalism and global capitalism all fuse together to exert their demands on them. It is no surprise then that Sisi becomes absorbed with the impersonation of quintessential identities only a few months after she arrives to Antwerp. Aside from the frustration of needing to fulfil the exploitative demands of Dele and Madam, she is additionally plagued with "cabin fever" (253). This experience of cabin fever can be interpreted metaphorically and literally and is invoked through her gaze and descriptive feeling about the various streets she negotiates. Simultaneously, her disenfranchised status as a Black undocumented migrant sex worker imprisons her, and the booth where she displays her body literally confines her. She abhors Schipperskwartier—the part of town where her booth is located, describing it with negative imageries like dead, ashamed, deserted, sad, mournful and desolate, the dirt polluting the roads of the other parts of the city she explores in her free time appears to not have made any negative impression on her. Her love and admiration for these other parts is reflected in the positive imagery, so much so that the dirt could not mortify her:

> She liked the Keyserlei with its promise of glitter: the Keyserlei Hotel with its gold facade and the lines and lines of shops. Ici Paris. H&M. United Colours of Benetton. Fashion Outlet. So many choices. She liked the rush of people, the mixing of skin colours, the noise on the streets. The Jews with their Hasidic discs, the women with their babies in pushchairs with big wheels. They all made her heart race, made her feel alive; a part of this throbbing living city (254).

In this quotation above, we can observe that her love for this part of the city is facilitated by the overwhelming presence of multiculturalism, in the context of which she enjoys random moments of belonging through her anonymity. The pollution has its own role to play in this display of sociability and her submission to it. Eventually, Sisi's urge to escape her disenfranchised and invisible reality overshadows her fear of Dele, Madam, and the possibility of her deportation by the foreign office. Under the influence of Luc's persuasion and material support, she kick-starts her plan. On an uneventful morning, without

any of the women knowing, she discreetly leaves the apartment on Schipper-skwartier with "nothing but her nightgown and toothbrush", for Luc's house in Edegem (276). While she rejects Luc's plan of going to the police, she comes up with her own creative way to beat the system. She would leave discreetly without no forwarding address, avoid any action that risks sabotaging the other women's optimistic dreams, convince Luc to marry her, and in five years, she could become a citizen, acquire some semblance of visibility, and squash the shadow of deportation hanging over her. The steps outlined above shows that she is neither conflicted about her voluntary involvement in her victimization nor ignorant of the legal consequences of belonging to the category of undesirable migrants. By construing the protagonist as an educated woman who is able to articulate this notion of being a complicit subject, Unigwe draws the reader into the white supremacist neoliberal global order and the paradox of complicit exploitation. Coming from a system where she played by every rule of success as dictated by postcolonial capitalist ideologue, yet could not rescue her family from poverty, Sisi is not a stranger to systemic inequality and injustice.

She knows that the probability of Dele and Madam being brought to justice is very low; a probability that reaches a credible climax after her murder, with the revelation that Madam has a few Belgian police officers in her pocket. What matters to Sisi is that their own complicity places them in an unfavorable position under the "affective and narrative tropes of the trafficking biographical border" (Mai 2016, 10). She repeatedly tells Luc that she is as complicit as Dele, when he naively insists that she could get justice on account of the illegality of her migration project: "He didn't exactly tie my hands and feet and dump me on the plane, you know. I could have chosen not to come. I was a grown woman and he did explain the situation to me" (Unigwe 270). Sisi is justifiably wary of what justice looks like for her and the other women. Justice could mean deportation and putting an end to all of their dreams of upward mobility. She knows the only way to get justice that exempts her from punishment or loss is to adjust her emancipatory strategy and center her rebellion on just herself. Marrying Luc and having children for him will not only protect her from the exploitative business of Dele but will also make her a "bona fide Belgian" (271).

The narrative, although offering glimpses of hope that this discreet plan might just end well for Sisi takes a turn for the worst. Her murder is ordered by Dele as retribution for her audacious escape, and her corpse is dumped on the street. Madam, described as nonchalantly muttering, "[a]nother one bites the dust—in a voice that she might have used to talk about the death of a dog or

a cockroach" (39), offers to act as intermediary between the police department and the remaining women, thus smoothly manipulating any official police investigation. Through a prolepsis to Efe's future career as a Madam, the reader finds out that the lack of fright expressed by Madam concerning the conduct of any official investigation is tied to the presence of corruption and greed in the Antwerp police department: "*Oyibo* policemen are greedy. They have *big eye*, not like the Nigerian ones who are happy with a hundred-naira bill. They ask for free girls. A thousand euros. Ah!" (40). In hindsight, it is not surprising that Sisi vehemently rejects Luc's suggestion to involve the police. Even in Edegem, Luc's suburb, which Sisi affectionately describes as enriched with social authenticity, the reader is drawn into the social reality and humanity of Black women as it is ubiquitously contoured by the structures of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and white humanitarianism. We see nuances of white benevolence in the casual conversations that strangers attempt to strike with her publicly.

> People would start conversations with her at bus stops and discuss the merits of the public transportation system over private ownership of cars. They would talk about the rising cost of bread. Old women would tell of when they lived in the Congo many decades ago, talk fondly of Albertville which had now been renamed something they could never remember, something African. Ask if you spoke Lingala. What you thought of Kabila. Talk of their niece who could not have a baby and adopted a beautiful little son from Rwanda. Or Burundi. 'Beautiful baby, only problem is his hair. Quite difficult to comb, the *krulletjes*. I told them to try the clothes softener I use. Smells nice and the best softener I've ever used. If it works on clothes no reason it should not work on hair. Don't you think? (280).

What we can extrapolate from this excerpt above is that Sisi's visibility is nevertheless shaped by tropes of white benevolence and supremacy, where images of Black children from African countries are used as objects of poverty to be saved by white people, and colonial cultural, economic, and political power relations continue to be sustained through a "humanitarian filter" (No white Saviors). In this commuter town, Sisi suffers hypervisibility as a Black woman, and although she is described as feeling liberated, seen, and finally becoming a part of something in her short visit, we cannot help but wonder for how long this feeling of visibility would last if her life did not come to a brutal end. By layering the protagonist's shortly gained visibility with incidents of anti-Blackness, the

author invites the reader to consider the inherent contradictions that accompany Black women's agency, and the sacrifices Black women are called upon to make in their struggle for liberation from the oppressive systems of white supremacy and patriarchy that denies them the right to dignity.

In the event of the news of Sisi's murder, Efe, Ama and Joyce are left to confront the ambivalence of their emotions. Even in their collective rage at the senseless killing of Sisi and their Madam's indifference, which reminds them of their disposability, they are equally terrified of being deported. They feel a sense of relief when Madam informs them that the police would not be questioning them directly:

> Everything will be all right. No need for any of you to worry. 'Them being the police. Madam has spoken to *them*, for lingering in the house, on the women's minds, is also the thought that they might be deported. But Madam has often said that she knows enough of the right people in the police force to ensure that as long as they do not try to cheat her the women were safe in Belgium (289).

Sisi's murder by Dele's henchman, Segun, and the Antwerp police's corrupted execution of justice demonstrate that the hesitancy of the four women to involve the police in their dehumanized reality is justifiable. And even though Joyce rambles on about trying to find an honest police officer or organizations, which support causes like theirs, so that Madam and Dele do not go scot-free, they conclusively will not, and will carry on with living their disenfranchised migrant lives until their debts to Dele are fully paid. I submit that the women's (in)actions are rooted in contradictory realities beyond hetero-patriarchy that dictate that they as racialized-gendered migrants must continue to find a balance between "bounded exploitation" and their agency (Mai 10, 2016), because in a world which rests upon "a structuring of the interests of white-dominated societies", the paradigms of empowerment available to poor Black women is most often by them creatively working around the system to reduce its harmful legacies and claims over their lives (Kempadoo 2015, 13). It is most often the case that fighting for justice is to their detriment, as evidenced by Sisi's murder and Efe's, Ama's and Joyce's actualization of their individual dreams, following their dutiful compliance with oppressive terms that are powerfully enmeshed in their layered marginalization as women, Africans, Black migrants, and sex workers.

In No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, my interrogations center around the carcerality of occupying the margins of the third world in postcolonial global economy, the voyeuristic and vulturous nature of white supremacy that engenders white humanitarianism, the manifestation of anti-Blackness and performative stereotyping in white humanitarian endeavors, and finally how migration policies and politics of citizenship are played out on bodies that carry the active legacy of colonial domination and racialized-gendered constructions. Although most essays that have been written on these novels mainly treat them as twenty-first century traumatic migration stories, I will extract the stories of the African female characters represented in the three novels, and the adverse effect that the (post)colonial white supremacist and patriarchal paradigms of power from inside and outside forces have on them.

In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, which is divided into two parts, we journey with a protagonist cum narrator (for the most part). The first part is about the impoverished reality of the protagonist, Darling and her four friends—Chipo, GodKnows, Sbho and Stina—in postcolonial Zimbabwe and the second part follows the protagonist's life after migrating to the United States with her Aunt Fostalina. Through the eyes of Darling, a ten-year-old girl, we learn about not just the postcolonial violence that is inflicted on the citizens of Zimbabwe in the wake of colonial independence, but most importantly the specific gender violence of rape, unsafe abortion, assault, environmental vulnerabilities and vilification that is suffered by postcolonial women, who are most often sidelined in postcolonial nationalist discourse. The fictional city of Paradise, where the first part of the novel is set, is ironically depicted as a shantytown where Darling and her displaced mother and grandmother relocate to after their beautiful home is demolished by the Mugabe government:

> There are two homes in my head: home before Paradise, and home in Paradise; home one and home two. Home one was best. A real house. Father and Mother having good jobs. Plenty of food to eat. Clothes to wear. Radios blaring every Saturday and everybody dancing because there was nothing to do but party and be happy. And then home two—Paradise, with its tin tin tin. There are three homes inside Mother's and Aunt Fostalina's heads: home before independence, before I was born, when black people and white people were fighting over the country. Home after independence, when black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made

> Aunt Fostalina leave and come here. Home one, home two, and home three. There are four homes inside Mother of Bone's head: home before the white people came to steal the country, and a king ruled; home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then the home of now. Home one, home two, home three, home four. When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly which one the person is referring to" (Bulawayo 192).

In the quotation above, we are introduced to a postcolonial social landscape that is marked by tumultuous events so much so that they call for distinctive recognition. Darling, a post-colonial child, is only able to shortly experience the positive changes in form of social, political, and economic liberation promised by anti-colonial freedom fighters before things completely fall apart. Paradise, where they hurriedly relocate to following their dispossession, deserves attention as it problematizes a space besieged by the condition of exile that is central to the characters' occupation of it. Paradise is depicted as bursting at the seams with clustered dilapidated shacks built by brokenhearted people. In one chapter titled "How They Appeared", the novelist uses an external narrator, an infrequent occurrence in the novel, to narrate the arrival of Darling's people to Paradise. The first few lines orchestrate that their arrival to Paradise is rooted in the exclusionary policies undertaken by a freshly sovereign state:

> They did not come to Paradise. Coming would mean that they were choosers […] They did not come, no, they just appeared. They appeared one by one, two by two, three by three. They appeared single file, like ants. In swarms, like flies. In angry waves, like a wretched sea. They appeared in the early morning, in the afternoon, in the dead of night. They appeared with the dust from their crushed houses clinging to their hair and skin and clothes, making them appear like things from another life. Swollen ankles and blisters under their feet, they appeared fatigued by the long walk. They appeared carrying sticks with which they marked the ground for where a shack would begin and end, and these, they carefully passed around, partitioning the new land with hands shaking like they were killing something. Squatting to mark the ground like that, they appeared broken—shards of glass people (Bulawayo 73).

Accompanying the erection of these provisional "shacks" are brokenhearted lamentations of the majority of the people who "appeared without the things

they should have appeared with" (74). Things like material valuables, cherished items, historical artefacts, and generational valuables, are left behind. This reveals a very sad tale of unexpected rupture with no latitude for neither rehousing nor farewell. Indeed, the cruelty of the police force is quantified by the level of violence carried out on women and children during the destruction of their old homes. A policeman knocks a defiant woman to the ground with his gun, and a child left at home by the mother is killed in the violent bulldozing. They are beyond shocked that their own government consisting of their own people, whom they fought alongside with for liberation from colonial powers, would do this to them: "Better a white thief do that to you than your own black brother. Better a wretched white thief" (75). In the narrative of resettlement into their exilic space, we see a people deeply marked by layers of misery, first dispossessed under colonialism by white people who took their lands and put them in "wretched reserves" (75), and then by their own African-led independent government. Their mourning, the reader comes to realize, is not only for their "perished pasts" (75), but also most importantly for their failed postcolonial nation. If the failure of the nation-state is not gripping enough, in later pages, we also witness a police-led parade and assault of Budapest – a lush district, where mainly white people live, and Africans work as security guards. A white male character, who also considers himself African by virtue of the fact that he was born there, together with his wife, are dragged from their home in similar humiliating fashion, served a property reacquisition notice, which underlines a facetious pro-African liberational propaganda. "Know this, you bloody colonist, from now on the black man is done listening, you hear? This is black-man country and the black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans, the boss says to thunderous applause" (118). According to Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom, this adoption of racial exclusionary policies, is used as a "smokescreen to cloak poor governance cum failed leadership" (2020, 12).

In this anticlimactic post-independent nation-state, everyone ultimately suffers different sorts of betrayal, but the white minority, who by virtue of their identity formation are "part and parcel of the Zimbabwean social fabric", serves as a "scapegoat for the country's political, economic and social woes" (13). While Ngom's reasoning is one way to look at the dispossession of the groups of people characterized in the novel, I contend that Bulawayo's narrative of national dispossession on the basis of race and ethnicity gives voice to the post-independent Zimbabwean's nationalist project as it is informed by the exclusionary ideologue of its British colonial predecessor. Nira Yuval-Davis reminds us in her *Woman-Nation-State* and *Gender and Nation* books that the main recipe of

Euro-American construction of nationhood has been racist, sexist, and westo-centric (non)coercive exclusionary ideologies, with the objective that the sacro-sanctity of the nation-state is protected from people framed as outsiders (1997, 74–84 and 1989, 6–14). By conscientiously detailing the hostile and coercive or-ganizing principles employed by the Mugabe regime in a freshly post-indepen-dent sovereign nation, Bulawayo capably addresses the construction of post-colonial nationalism as an inherited value system.

The inhabitants of Paradise (men, women, and children) are deeply marked by the high expectations and disappointment that follow every election, so much so that they become disillusioned and resort to migrating to the West and neighboring apartheid South Africa, where they continue to suffer un-der the debilitating structure of anti-Black racial ideologies. It is under this shadow of extreme poverty, destitution, repressive governance, failed lead-ership, anti-Black capitalism, and unchecked abuse that Darling and her friends grow up and roam the city of Paradise, as well as neighboring towns like the affluent Budapest, populated by white people, and Shanghai, which is controlled by Chinese capitalist developers. Their wanderings through these locales bring to light the wide socio-economic gap between white European people and Africans, reminiscent of colonial legacy and the new Chinese capitalist takeover of the continent, which shares similarity with European colonialism in that the economic benefits are controlled by foreign actors and the needs of the Indigenous people remain secondary. Just like the suburb of Budapest where Black Zimbabweans serve as security guards for white people's homes, they also serve as menial workers under the supervision of Chinese contractors.

In the midst of their perversive hunger, Darling and her friends are nev-ertheless awed by this new encroaching power structure and refer to China as "a big dog" (Bulawayo 43). When one of the children asks the Chinese contrac-tor if they are building a school, apartment quarters or a hospital complex, his boastful response that they are building big malls and shopping complexes is a shameful reminder of the position of postcolonial African subjectivity as an exploitable condition. Concisely, what we witness is a post-independence fail-ure, where Africans are used as collateral damage and left unprotected by their own government. They come to the painful realization that the only resort is to leave their own liberated country, which they fought tirelessly for. It is the preoccupation of the adult characters with emigration, also effervescent in the everyday lives, chitchats and games played by Darling and her friends as they wander around, that the novel is mostly analyzed as a migration novel. With

the schools shut down, the children also feel a sense of betrayal at being denied the opportunity to nurture their curiosity about the outside world and strive for better socioeconomic conditions like the ones that exist for white Zimbabweans in the coveted Budapest district. So, while they look forward to one day owning beautiful houses and plenty of money, it is not lost on them that emigrating out of the "kaka country" might be the only way that they get a fair chance (13). Thus, following in the footsteps of the adult characters, they also long for the day luck would smile upon them and their relatives who already left would send for them. This is a throbbing desire that materializes early for Darling, as the younger sister of her mother, her Aunt Fostalina, returns to take her to America.

Under this climate of postcolonial betrayal, the lives of Black teenage girls and women are especially appalling. What is particularly striking about Bulawayo's novel is her validation of African women's experiences. She engages with African women's contradictory positions within and outside the postcolonial nation-state of Zimbabwe. How the female characters confront postcolonial national disintegration in nearly the same depth as the ways in which they are affected by the state's brutality is evoked. What we see is an array of African female characters on whose bodies inherited colonial gendered nationalist logic is expressed and implemented. By positioning African women at the center of their sectarian post-independent nation-state, Bulawayo communicates her concern with the ways in which gender relations, interpretations of womanhood and the African family collective are affected by this shifting exclusionary nationalist organizing principle. One way she does this is by assigning the nation's memory to women in their role as mothers. In the chapter 'How They Appeared", the dispossessed ethnic group is described as left with nothing "except of course memories, their own, and those passed down by their mothers and mother's mothers" (76). By firmly placing women at the center of the nation's formation and survival, I argue that Bulawayo approximates feminist theories at the intersection of nation and gender, which have interrogated the way in which the nation is constructed as feminine and women as mothers are bequeathed with the enduring function of its reproduction and continuation.

Incontrovertibly, in Bulawayo's novel, African female bodies are subject to multiple-fold (post)colonial violence and domination. The African familial collective is shattered, as fathers abandon their family to find jobs in neighboring countries and mothers become sole breadwinners. Rebuilding becomes their sole responsibility as we witness in Darling's case, whose family's shack and

bed is built by her mother and grandmother after their displacement and abandonment. Darling's father is one of the people who chose to leave for South Africa during the period of mass emigration to other countries. Prior to the nation's collapse, Darling describes their living situation as happy and real – "real house, [...], real walls, real windows, real floors, and real doors and a real shower and real taps and real running water and a real toilet, [...], real sofas and real beds and a real TV and real clothes. Everything real" (Bulawayo 63). The father's altered temperament from kind, funny and loving to angry, distant, and frightening is also a strong indication of the impact that these adopted exclusionary ideal have on gender constructs and relations. I argue that the postcolonial exclusivity sets the scene for a change in men's temperament and behavior in intimate relationships. Even though Darling's father does not manifest physically abusive behavior, his hostility, which ends up pivoting Darling and her mother into the stereotypical corporeal subjugated position, is unmistakable: "Mother kept on stirring the pot on the fire, choosing to ignore him. Those days, you knew when and when not to talk to Father from the tone in his voice, that tone that could switch on and off like the lights" (92). Darling's father leaves for South Africa not too long after, with the promise that he would send home nice things. He fails to keep his promise and Darling's mother is saddled with the sole responsibility of managing the familial domain. He finally returns home after many years, terminally sick with HIV and the female family members (his own mother, Darling, and Darling's mother) assume the responsibility of caring for him until he succumbs to death.

What we witness in Bulawayo's novel is a gendered implication of the social phenomenon, which centralizes the sovereignty of the nation in maleness. Male violence becomes normalized and for the female characters who exist at the intersection of Blackness and femaleness, they assume the responsibility of fighting to keep their family from falling apart under the postcolonial exclusionary nationalist values, even as they experience forms of gender specific violence engendered by the said patriarchal articulations of state violence.

> And when they [the men] returned to the presence of their women and children and everybody else, they stuck hands deep inside torn pockets until they felt their dry thighs, kicked little stones out of the way, and erected themselves like walls again, but then the women, who knew all the ways of weeping and all there was to know about falling apart, would not be deceived; they gently rose from the hearths, beat dust off their skirts, and

planted themselves like rocks in front of their men and children and shacks,
and only then did all appear almost tolerable (76–77).

From the excerpt above, I reiterate that postcolonial women's action of habitu-
ally rising and fighting relentlessly for their men and children because they are
very familiar with degradation speaks to their layers of Otherness. That which
is only visible with a subjective and comprehensive reading of the text are the
fundamental contradictions in the conditions of their status—that they have
experienced firsthand the systemic gendered racism of colonialism that post-
colonial continuation of their abjection is merely another layer of oppression to
confront. One might be tempted to assume that they would be accorded grand
respect due to the centrality that they play in restoring the civil society. How-
ever, I contend that this expectation would pass as ironic due to the backdrop
of the adopted ethnocentric patriarchal orientation of nationalism, which de-
pends hugely on the specific relational category of womanhood as second-class
(Yuval-Davis 1997).

As becomes evident in *We Need New Names*, the female characters are
treated and alluded to as villainous subjects by men and their bodies are sub-
jected to gendered violence, even as they use their mutilated bodies to defend
the same men from state brutality vis-a-vis patriarchal articulations of na-
tionhood. One woman is bludgeoned with a policeman's gun until she bleeds.
Another's child is killed without remorse. In Paradise, sexual and physical
forms of gendered violence run rampant. Upon the return of Darling's father
with HIV, Darling and her mother are scapegoated by Prophet Revelations
Bitchington Mborro, the pastor of the only Christian church in the vicinity,
who Darling's mother requests to visit the shack to pray for the miracle of
healing. According to him, Darling is possessed by her grandfather's spirit,
and it is this spirit that is "devouring his [Darling's father] blood and body,
making him all bony and sick and taking his strength away" (Bulawayo 99).
Darling's mother on the other hand is accused of being possessed by three
demons, which causes her to be unhappy and badly tempered, "rendering her
a dangerous woman" (99). They are then asked to bring two fat white virgin
goats and five hundred US dollars or euros for the continuation of the healing
project. A female chorister is branded the devil and ordered to silence for
singing out of turn. Another woman, described as pretty, is branded a devil,
and raped by the prophet in the presence of his followers. She is forcefully
dragged to the church for deliverance by a group of men, one of whom Dar-
ling suspects to be her husband. Even before the woman is dragged up the

mountain to the presence of the prophet, he already brands her a devil as soon as he can identify that the scream belongs to a woman. When the woman persistently screams to be left alone, her voice described as "angry like it can strike and kill things" is dismissed and drowned in the litany of the congregants' prayers (38). We do not know anything about this female character who is viciously raped to the point of despondency in broad daylight, and more importantly, to the excitement and celebration of the adults present: "The men who brought her are happy, especially the tall one who makes like he is the husband, the church people are happy, mother of Bones is happy, but I am sad the pretty woman is just lying there [...]" (40). We are left with an incomplete story because the woman is not asked for her side of whatever incident must have caused the men to drag her to church, neither does Bulawayo offer any omniscient explanation.

I read this fragmentation as a stylistics device employed by Bulawayo to produce the desired result, which is to unmask the concepts, one of which is colonial Judeo-Christian religion, through which the invisibility and victimization of African women is guaranteed in the postcolonial society. The proliferated biblical creation story of Adam and Eve in Judeo-Christian historiography and "particularly the parts that locate the blame for disobedience and the subsequent expulsion from the garden squarely on Eve", as Elaine J. Lawless writes, has over the years functioned as an apologia for the abuse and violence rendered by men against women in contemporary society (2003, 239). According to Lawless, "no other single story has influenced more cultures to think [of the female body as blameworthy] as single-mindedly as has the Adam and Eve story", and it appears that even as feminist re-readings of the story have been carried out and various versions of the story questioned, yet the power of the core story predominates global cultures (244). What is particularly attention grabbing in Bulawayo's novel is that the Prophet is characterized by Darling as not just an uneducated person who is bad at reading the bible, but a "dunderhead" who would not have excelled even if he went to school (36). This description reinforces Lawless's argument, that the performance of authority established over the female characters, rests solely on the religious belief of male superiority and women as inherently devilish, also successfully internalized by said female congregants. Lawless further demonstrates how the indoctrination of individual women about their abject nature is accomplished. By being forced to read their body as signification of their devilish ontology, they come to "accept responsibility for their own participation in the transcription of their body as abject" (2003, 256). The pretty woman publicly raped to the point of resignation

and to the approval of everyone present embodies this forceful indoctrination. Her pre-discursive blameworthy nature already renders her condemned and no matter how loud she screams; her femaleness renders her invisible.

By this established relational fundament, her loud protest amidst the prophet and congregation's loud chanting and prayers for the demon inside her to leave will only transcribe to everyone present that further action needs to be carried out to guarantee her subjection, leading to the prophet's conviction that the only way to make this happen is to rape her into submission. The rape of her body is the prophet's way of forcing her to participate in her own acceptance of her abjection. The outcome of resignation and silence after the act is a signifier of her conquest and acceptance of her own abjection to the congregation, and this is why the church program ironically ends on a note of excitement. Likewise, this climate allows for the budding bodies of young girls to be sexually violated by adult men and subsequently overlooked by adults (men and women) in the evidence of their sexual abuse. Chipo, Darling's eight years old friend, who at the beginning of the novel is introduced as visibly pregnant and non-communicative as a result, embodies this narrative of abjection. After witnessing the rape of the pretty woman by Prophet Mborro, she is able to link her experience to the woman's and name her grandfather as the rapist:

> He did that, my grandfather, I was coming from playing Find bin Laden and my grandmother was not there and my grandfather was there and he got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain, Chipo says, words coming out all at once like she is Mother of Bones. I watch her and she has this look like I have never seen before, this look of pain. I want to laugh that her voice is back, but her face confuses me and I can also see she wants to say something, something maybe important, so I say, Do you want to go and steal guavas? (Bulawayo 41).

I analyze Chipo's silence on two levels; as an acceptance of her abjection and her inability to understand and name her experience due to her innocence. Through witnessing the violation of another female body, she is propelled out of her silence. But beyond pointing out the similarity of her experience, she is unable to give expression to her feeling due to the limitation of understanding. I argue that her witnessing of the woman's loud resistance communicates to her that this is a violation of her body that should not have happened, and

the emotion of pain is finally able to take its rightful place. While the children (boys and girls) can easily sneak out of their shacks to wander out of Paradise due to the fact of their invisibility, Chipo's rape by her grandfather and Darling's accusation by Prophet Mborro shows that the normalized representation of their female bodies, to be dominated by men, renders them hyper-visible for gendered violence and at the same time invisible with regard to the recognition of their abused condition. Even though Chipo's rape leads to pregnancy, at no point in the novel is this blatant case of child abuse addressed by the adults in Paradise. What we see instead is a pregnant eleven-year-old child who due to her innocence is lacking in the language to explain and comprehend her current condition, yet enjoys no privilege of adults' intervention and protection. Even when she is able to speak again and can express her pain, she only has Darling, her fellow playmate, who is also a child and can only make a rejoinder that they go back to their activity of stealing guavas. Their naivete and lack of adults' intervention and nurturing finally leads them (only the girls) to decide to help Chipo to be rid of the baby so that she can return to her high-spirited self. While they obviously are not equipped with the skill to attempt this, their gendered awareness prompts the decision to leave their male playmates (Bastard, GodKnows and Stina) out of their daring plan.

Offering a deconstructive analysis of the gender violence that pervades Bulawayo's novel, Carmen Concilio argues that the cynical contemplation and indifference of the children to Chipo's pregnant condition suggests that "such a condition were normal after all, even at such a young age" (2018, 37). Indeed, the subsequent action they choose to pursue is a revelation of the world of normalized gendered violence that they grow up in. First, they assume a clinical yet curious stance about the manner in which Chipo and by extension women are able to get pregnant. Their debate on who put the baby in her, when her stomach would return to normal, if the baby is a boy or girl, where exactly the baby would come out of, how the baby got into her stomach in the first place, how she would breastfeed the baby with her small breasts etc. suggests childlike innocence, and yet some form of familiarity with this adult condition. In fact, they go on to reveal that aside from getting rid of the baby to free Chipo from her discomfort, they are also doing it to prevent her forthcoming death at the point of her delivery like Nosizi, a young girl who recently died from giving birth. Maternal mortality is apparently a common occurrence casually discussed by the women of Paradise to the listening ears of the children. They (Darling, Sbho and Forgiveness) devise a plan to take Chipo to a corner outside of the impromptu meandering of adults. They gather items like human urine,

medium-sized stones, brown leather belt, a metal cup, a rusted clothes hanger, and although they do not know how these items would become important to their abortion undertaking, they are happy that they are doing something that would prevent the death of their friend. In addition, they also adopt medical characters and references that is acquired from a US medical TV show. Sbho, who suggested this mimicry, avouches that this is the only way they can be sure to do it right: "In order to do this right, we need new names" (Bulawayo 82). Even though Darling and Forgiveness appear not to understand this reference and the roles that could possibly go with the names Sbho has given them, their deference to Sbho's instruction suggests the establishment of knowledge vis-a-vis technology that is grounded in the "conceptualizations of center and periphery" (Heron 2007, 55). The need for new names as arbitrary as the decision may look is set in motion by their hyper-awareness of a centre that is rooted elsewhere. This parody of a US TV show I argue is employed by the writer to enunciate the asymmetrical relational dynamics and cultural dialogue that is played out in the postcolonial social space.

Darling and Sbho proceed to massage Chipo's stomach, and in the process, Sbho remarks that she wishes she has a stethoscope, followed by Chipo's wish for a proper doll. Forgiveness, on the other hand opts for sharpening the clothes hanger with a stone. When they ask what she intends to do with it, she declares that she overheard from her sister that the hanger is an essential abortion tool: "The clothes hanger goes through the thing. You push it in until all of it disappears inside; it reaches deep into the stomach, where the baby is, hooks it and then you can pull it out" (85). While she cannot answer Chipo's frantic question if it will cause her pain, the consensus is that it is either this hanger or death at childbirth. They continue this way until an adult, MotherLove, stumbles upon them and starts to weep in a helpless manner as soon as they reveal their plan to her. Like the rest of the female characters, who have been treated as pre-discursive evil subjects, and or are made to participate in the narrative of their own abjection through rape, sexual abuse and religious exorcism, MotherLove's silent tears and ultimate inaction is a witness to the adults' helplessness and particularly the state of powerlessness women have been cast into in this postcolonial Zimbabwe. The dialogue amongst the children I argue, is revealing of the intersections of anti-Blackness, misogynoir and third world positionality. Chipo's desire to have a doll in her pregnant state articulates the contradictions that trail the girls' lives vis-a-vis the workings of misogynoir. The desire for a doll symbolizes that she is still in possession of the emotional maturity of a child. That while they all have been cast in the roles and identi-

ties of adulthood as a result of their immediate socio-economic disempowered state that leads back to colonial and neo-colonial power structures, they are still girl children who have been denied systemic protection. Finally, their awareness of the world beyond their own squalor, which shows up in the adoption of new names, captures a one-sided first-world and third-world relational basis that would become clearer later, as forms of colonial continuity are increasingly brought to life in the novel.

Another episode of violence presented right at the beginning of the novel establishes itself further as gender violence when juxtaposed with Darling's father's return after contracting the AIDS virus and the chain of events that happen thereafter. During one of their scouting of the neighborhood looking for guava trees to steal from, the children stumble upon "a tall thing dangling in a tree like a strange fruit" (16). It turns out to be the corpse of a woman. Slowly discovering it is not a thing, they realize it is a person and finally distinguish it as a woman. This gendered progression is used by Bulawayo to create a starker image in the reader's mind. To ponder on what could be the mystery behind the death, and who is responsible, if it was murder or suicide. We discover later in the chapter that narrates Darling's father's sudden return to Paradise after years of absence that the dead woman also had AIDS and chose instead to kill herself. For Darling's father on the other hand, he chooses to return home to be taken care of by the female familial members (his mother, wife, and daughter). They take turns attending to his needs and keeping the secret of his sickness. The stigmatization that follows HIV/AIDS in this era is brought to life in the novel. Darling's mother warns her sternly not to tell anyone: "Shhh—you must not tell anyone, and I mean *an-y-one*, you hear me? Mother says, looking at me like she is going to eat me. That your father is back and that he is sick" (93). AIDS is treated as a taboo subject in the community and referred to simply as the Sickness. However, from the dialogue amongst the children about Darling's father's condition, it appears that that it is not an uncommon illness in the community, and his condition is simply an open secret nobody wants to openly discuss. On top of them caring for him around the clock, they also fast and pray for him. The care continues through their physical exhaustion, and their vilification by Prophet Mborro. Not once do they (Darling's mother and Mother Bones) give expression to their position or sentiment, if they have any.

Needless to say, I locate my examination of gendered violence in the juxtaposition of the woman's choice to commit suicide versus Darling's father's choice to return home to be cared for notwithstanding the years of abandonment. Darling's mother and grandmother are described as fasting and praying

for his health through their own exhaustion: "Mother of Bones has her eyes closed and is praying fervently, a vein popped on her forehead. [...] Mother's eyes are tired and her face is tired; ever since Father came she has been busy doing things for him [...]" (97). Darling herself is not happy with this situation of things because it means she can no longer go on guava hunting expedition with her friends, but there is nothing she can do about it. The decision has been made for her that she must leave everything to look after a man who means nothing to her. Placing these seemingly independent choices of Darling's father and the woman hanging from the tree in the context of the abjection of feminine bodies thus far analyzed in the novel, it is my argument that the woman's suicide is another incident of gender violence narrated in the novel. Given the vilification of African women in this postcolonial city of Paradise, what is seemingly an unrelated turn of events attains a gendered allusion. I argue that Darling's father's decision to return home to be cared for comfortably locates culpability on the outside of him and his actions. For the woman on the other hand, I construe her suicide as the implication of a social fabric that vilifies women and locates culpability in their bodies.

The colonial continuities increasingly dramatized in the novel are evidenced in the constructs of race and the asymmetrical relational foundation that is inherent with the production and manifestation of race in postcolonial societies. That the children adopt Western names in order to perform an abortion is not simply an articulation of transcultural interaction and knowledge exchange that could be surmised as proof of a de-centered globalized world or symmetrical border transgression (Yuval-Davis 1997). Furthermore, the country-game they invent to play in their free time is an allegory of this hierarchical world order, and asymmetrical relations between Western and non-Western countries. This country-game involves drawing an imaginary world map on the ground, which is in turn split into geographical or country parts. The first stage of the game involves competing to select particular countries "because everybody wants to be the USA and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece" (Bulawayo 49). Afterwards, the losers settle for the countries in the middle hierarchy like "Dubai and South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. They are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here" (49). But most importantly, none of the children are keen on playing for countries "like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in" because they are all considered to be "rags of countries" only known for poverty and chaos (49). The ultimate aim of

the game is for the first selected caller to call out a country defended by a weak runner who can be easily outperformed. In this particular scene, the game is abruptly cut short by the anticipated visit of some white NGO workers. They all scamper to welcome the NGO lorry, but not before the names of countries that have suffered defeat are revealed by the narrator: "Sudan and Congo and Guatemala and Iraq and Haiti and Afghanistan have all been counted out and are sitting at the borders watching the countries-countries play" (50). That the countries that have already been counted out are non-Western countries and belong to the bottom hierarchy is no narrative serendipity. This scoreboard is a motif employed by Bulawayo to further illuminate the central idea of Western and non-Western asymmetrical power relations that is established in the game design. In addition, the use of phrases like "borders" and "countries-countries" evoke the margin versus center globalization process at work.

More colonial continuities are presented through the NGO's visit. The NGO workers composed of two white ladies, one white man, an African male driver and an African woman, and the relational dynamic struck with the locales reveal the race constructions and hierarchies that underpin the popular contemporary movement of white humanitarianism, and how white humanitarian practices and involvement in previously colonized countries, is only but a function of imperial white supremacy. The practices described in the novel encompass reveling in the exploitable condition of the locales for the emotional validation of white transcendence and instituting formalities and codes of behavior that uphold accumulated white material power, even as it claims to engage in acts of service to enshrine dignity of life in fictional Zimbabwe. Recent works in critical race studies and critical whiteness studies, such as Adia Benton, Polly Pallister Wilkins, Andrew Baldwin and Bruce Erickson, and Barbara Heron have critiqued that any theoretical attempt to divest humanitarian discourse from white supremacy is an endeavor to obfuscate the structure that underpins the conception of this project everyone has come to believe as indispensable to the survival of humanity. Aida Benton specifically circumstantiates that anti-Blackness and white supremacy's centrality to the flourishing project of white humanitarianism in previously colonized countries can be extrapolated in the hierarchical racial nature of humanitarian mobility that further intersects with citizenship, gender, class and nationality, the terms of engagement (implicit and explicit) and normative professional ethics and comportment (2016). For instance, the hierarchical nature of humanitarian work begins at the level of staff recruitment, with the upper hierarchy "dominated by white European and American practitioners", and African expatriates at the bottom,

recruited for the major part because of their Native identity, and who come to learn that they must observe the "norms of Euro-American humanitarian professional ethics and comportment" for a chance at individual professional advancement in the field (2016, 268).

Aida Benton and Barbara Heron in their separate works also both touch on the multiple relational dynamic that is actively recycled in the development context, and that can be discerned from humanitarian developmental narratives. First, they assert that the relational foundation of whiteness is powerfully dependent on the discursive inferiorization of non-white people. That being the case, for the humanitarian project of intervening in Africans' existence, they argue that white humanitarian workers must be inspired with their own superiority of self and position, and Africa must be constructed as the Other, which requires white civilization, subjectivity, and inscription to be accorded full humanity. And as this positional asymmetry has been established over the years through white-centered epistemologies, it is not unimaginative to assume that African workers and locales implicated within these degrees of relational proximity, come to negotiate their subjectivities in different ways, which could look like succumbing to the humanitarian overtures or asserting their boundaries in response to the humanitarian's encroachment. Ultimately for the African people, the experience of racism is inevitable in the interpersonal interactions between white humanitarian workers and the Black beneficiaries of their humanitarian projects (2016, 268–270 and 2007, 56–90).

I argue that it is with this framework of decolonial critique that Bulawayo engages with the culture of NGOs and their projects in African countries. The entire chapter dedicated to the interaction of the NGO workers with the women and children of Paradise is a depiction of a relational foundation that is powerfully dependent on the discursive perception of these previously colonized Black bodies as inferior and in need of their aids. Firstly, the NGO's visitation modality is such that they visit on the fifteenth of each month, but they skip an entire month with no notice to the locales. From the moment the children sight the NGO lorry, we witness an immediate adjustment in the subjectivities of the children to align with the ideals and behaviors favored by the NGO workers. Against their teenage desire to run and meet the lorry, they immediately get to clearing the playground, followed by singing and dancing. It appears that they have been previously warned against running to meet the NGO lorry halfway: "What we really want is to take off and run to meet the lorry but we know we cannot. Last time we did, the NGO people were not happy about it, like we had committed a crime against humanity" (51). What

they are required instead to do is clear the playground, followed by singing and dancing to impress them.

> Now we are singing and screaming like we are proper mad. We bare our teeth and thrust our arms upwards. We tear the ground with our feet. We squint in the dust and watch the doors of the lorry, waiting for the NGO people to come out, but we don't stop singing and dancing. We know that if we do it hard, they will be impressed, maybe they will give us more, give and give until we say, NGO, please do not kill us with gifts (51).

Of relevance is the fact that the people of Paradise enthusiastically anticipate the visit of the NGO people. The relational intimacy evoked in this site of development is one structured along the axis of enfranchised and disenfranchised, such that the NGO people can skip an entire month without correspondence yet expect to occupy the center as soon as their lorry is sighted. This suggests a disregard for the people's humanity even as they grant them humanitarian aids. Furthermore, the professional hierarchy represented in the novel is consistent with Benton's anthropological study of the humanitarian institution. Darling's uninhibited perception of the relationship between them and the NGO across their differences of agency teases out this organizational ranking. There are five NGO workers. Of the five, three are white and two are African Natives. The white people "whom you can just look at and know they're not from here" are at the top of the hierarchy (51). The African female liaison is employed for her Native identity and her responsibility is to "explain us [Darling and her people] to the white people, and them to us" (51–52). And finally, the African male worker is the designated driver for the trip, and his low status is likewise supposed by Darling: "Besides the fact that he drives, he doesn't look important" (52). From Darling's reenactment of Sis Betty's arbitration, we see that Sis Betty perfectly embodies Benton's submission that the professional ethics of white humanitarianism rests upon the low-ranking positioning of Black African people and elevation of Euro-American norms even as the dogma of racial equality is proclaimed (2016, 268). She employs words like baboons and buffoons, which have been used as racial pejoratives, in order to force the children into docility. At the same time, she elevates the socio-culture of the white NGO workers and performs the facetious solidarity required for her job position.

> What are you doing, masascum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya you think this ex-
> pensive white people came all the way from overseas ipapa to see you act
> like baboons? Do you want to embarrass me, heh? Futsekani, don't be buf-
> foons zinja, behave at once or else we'll get in the lorry and drive off right
> this minute with all this shit! She says. Then Sis Betty turns to the NGO peo-
> ple and smiles her gap-toothed smile. They smile back, pleased. Maybe they
> think she just told us good things about them (Bulawayo 54–55).

As soon as they alight from the lorry, and before the sharing of gifts even com-
mences, the white NGO workers immediately start taking pictures of the chil-
dren and their parents. Circling back to Darling and her fellow dwellers of Par-
adise, they feel humiliated, embarrassed, and disenfranchised by this aspect of
the NGO's conduct in their space and relationship to their bodies but feel pow-
erless to do anything about it. On the other hand, the specific kind of pictures
of Black bodies NGOs are interested in capturing belies the anti-Black racist
socialization that is foundational to their humanitarian venture. Chipo with
her protruded belly is particularly a fascinating object to be captured. In fact,
many pictures are taken of her "like she has become Paris Hilton" and the fact
of her discomfort goes unnoticed by the cameraman (53). Godknows's Black
buttocks, which can be seen through his torn shorts is another fascinating ob-
ject to be captured. Bastard, another child, who attempts to smile and pose for
the camera is told to quieten down by Godknows because the performance the
white gaze requires of them is a diminutive one: "You are not supposed to laugh
or smile. Or any of that silly stuff you are doing, Godknows says" (53). Bastard's
response that he wants to be recognized for himself and not for his buttocks
and frayed clothing demonstrates the paradoxical condition of invisibility and
hypervisibility that trails their existence. As long as they are bringing gifts to
ease their suffering, the rules of engagement are decided by white humanitar-
ian narratives and the African children's expression of boundaries mean noth-
ing to the white NGO workers because they do not see them as humans. The
adults of Paradise are also not left out of this relational hierarchy as we see in
the case of MotherLove, who despite her outright disdain for the visit of the
NGO workers and rejection of their gifts, is treated like a petulant child and
cajoled with more gifts to change her mind.

> Hawu, MotherLove! Sis Betty shouts in a silly voice like she is coaxing a stupid
> child. Please come, bantu, can't you see we've brought you gifts? She says.
> The NGO people hold out more little packages to MotherLove, and the two

white women even bare their teeth like grinning dogs. Everybody is waiting to see what MotherLove will do. She turns and strides away, head held high, the bangles on her arms jingling, the stars on her dress shining, her scent of lemon staying in the air even after she is gone (56).

Cajoling MotherLove with more gifts even at her poignant disdain substantiates the notion that the people of Paradise, by virtue of their Africanness, are viewed by the white NGO workers through the lens of a subordinate subjectivity. Barbara Heron expounds on this relational behavior that presents itself in the development context as a constellation of colonial continuities, which can be traced to a planetary consciousness within which previously colonized subjects and their world have been predominantly represented as available to white people. White developmental workers go into this space with the consciousness that they have a right to be there, to intervene and to establish relations in ways designed by them. The racialized images captured according to Heron, is part of a long legacy of colonial stereotypes, and serve to reassert the carnivalesque representations of the African people and culture that abound in Western culture (2007, 57). Indoctrinated under this consciousness of the carnivalesque nature of African subjectivities, it is unfathomable to the white NGO workers that the people are capable of exerting social boundaries, so even when they articulate their disapproval, their disapproval suffers reinterpretation and egregious dismissal. This egregious dismissal and disregard for African people's frank rejection according to Heron, is "an enactment of domination that relies on the positional superiority of whiteness" (2007, 88).

This brazen objectification of Black bodies and mobility within their social spaces I argue is also for commodification purpose, to drive donation in the Western countries and keep the humanitarian organization operational, as we will see in the second part of the novel, which follows Darling's sojourn in the US and the migrant experiences existing within this gamut. The subtext in these kinds of images reveal that the monstrous and jarring presentation of the African people is crucial to white humanitarian ventures. bell hooks explains this postcolonial and post-slavery objectification of and indulgence in racial difference as the commodification of Otherness (1992). Hooks credits the enduring success of this commodification culture to its offering of a new transformative way for whiteness to continue its obsession with its own superior and transcendent nature without directly emulating the historical violent model of racist domination. Within this culture, "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (1992,

366). What this means is that the mobility of Black bodies within their cultural space becomes a site for profiteering and aesthetic props for the glorification of whiteness and validation for their interference as seen also in the BBC reporters' attendance of the funeral ceremony of Bornfree, a resident of Paradise who is murdered by the despotic Zimbabwean government for daring to clamor for political change. The mourners' visceral rage and sorrowfulness, together with the children's performance of Bornfree's incarceration and torture by the state is shown to be a treasure trove for the BBC.

What we do not see in the interaction between the NGO and Paradise dwellers is a modicum of consent, informed or otherwise, that indicates an acknowledgment of the Natives' humanity and right to subjectivity. What we see however is the non-reciprocal nature of the established interaction, further enunciating the unequal power relations that whiteness and its humanitarian undertaking thrives upon. That the children are very careful "not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to them" is a symbol of nefarious degradation that underpins the institution of humanitarianism (Bulawayo 54). Both the African children who know not to touch the white NGO workers and white NGO workers who violate African people's boundaries even as they uphold theirs are engendered by a colonial consciousness of racial hierarchy. Thus, it is not surprising that the so-called gifts brought by the NGO workers are feckless things that provide neither relief nor positive transformation to the people's deplorable situation. The children are given items like toy guns, sweets, t-shirts, unsuitable dresses etc. and the adults' small packets of beans, sugar, and maize meals. The cautious anticipation expressed by the adults quickly develops into discontentment and humiliation: "They look at the tiny packages like they don't want them, like they are embarrassed and disappointed by them, but in the end they turn and head back to the shacks with the things" (55).

For once, the drama of humanitarian intervention is explored through the eyes of the people at the receiving end of charity, which is very rarely the case. By flipping the narrative and centering the marginalized people's agency to name their needs and claim their dissatisfaction even in their deplorable and disenfranchised condition, Bulawayo unmasks the questionable logic of what Polly Pallister-Wilkins explicates as "humanitarian-ameliorative practices" and whose purpose and gratification it really serves (2021, 100). According to Pallister-Wilkins, logics of care is one of the range of controls that white people have been able to use to relieve both their white colonial guilt with respect to

the racist treatment of non-white people and the trepidation of relinquishing their white privilege in the event of deliberate racial justice (2021). If white humanitarianism as I have argued is a branch of white supremacy whose function is to secure whiteness at the top and continue its supremacy, then it goes without saying that it cannot cause its own demise, and finding solutions beyond ameliorative interventions would be doing just that—causing its own demise. For once, it is very clear who the predominant beneficiary of humanitarian ventures in terms of material and emotional kickbacks is. Suffice it to say that a close reading of *We Need New Names* spotlights what it feels like to be the Other, to suffer through humiliating relational dynamics, to tolerate disturbing intimacies with one's miserable condition that do not seek to end it, to be stripped of subjectivity and dismissed even when we find the agency to express our discomfort.

So, when Darling migrates to the US, it does not come as a rude shock to the reader that she finds herself yet again at the receiving end of anti-immigration attitudes that is deeply rooted in anti-Black racism amidst many other -isms. Carmen Concilio rightfully considers Darling's migration project as some sort of inevitable downfall as a result of her pocket of identities and the intersecting systems of oppression that accompanies these identities. For Concilio, Darling and her catastrophic migratory experience in the US reflects a postcolonial migrant condition that will always involve "traumas and mental breakdowns" like invisibility, falsehood for survival and mental disorder (2018, 46). In the face of appearing to paint migrant projects with one brush with this kind of reasoning, Concilio substantiates that these "affinities of vulnerabilities" suffered by postcolonial migrants are in addition to the heterogeneity that can be derived from subjectivity (49). For people like Darling who are migrants from postcolonial African countries, migration is not a pot of sweetness and does not end on a positive note. What I call attention to however in my analysis is the prevalence of the notion of carnivalesque Africa and commodification of Otherness expanded upon independently by Heron and Hooks in mainstream America (2007, 1981). Darling's sojourn in the US becomes a window to the consciousness that engenders the NGO workers' attitude in Paradise. In this second part of the novel, the drama of humanitarian intervention is briefly explored from the perspective of the white Americans, giving the reader the opportunity to see what images of Africa are consumed by the West and the consequences of such images for African people. One such scene that addresses this carnivalesque inscription and reproduction of Africa is at an interracial wedding of a family friend Darling attends with her Aunt Fostalina. With the ironical

statement "I know that of all the Americans, it's really the white people who love Africans the most, but still looking at how many of them are at the wedding, I can't help but think, *This can't be just* love" (Bulawayo 170), Bulawayo doubly piques the reader's curiosity and foreshadows the narrative development. Darling later discovers that the reason for the huge turnout of white people is because the bride is white. However, the statement above sketches an obvious question in the mind of the reader that needs answer: how did Darling reach this conclusion that white Americans love Africans the most in the US?

The answer to that question is soon revealed as the wedding progresses and Darling excuses herself to use the toilet. There, she meets a white woman who is also a guest at the wedding. The white woman immediately takes to admiring her "interesting face" as soon as she confirms that Darling is also from Africa like the groom (174). She asks Darling to say something in her language. Just as in Paradise where they are made to perform for the pleasure of the NGO workers, Darling finds herself obliging her even though she would rather not: "I let out an inward sigh because this is so stupid, but I remember to keep my face smiling. I say one word, sa–*li–bo–na–ni*, and I say it slowly so she doesn't ask me to repeat it" (174). For every personal question Darling is compelled to answer about her African identity, the woman gushes over profusely and declares beautiful.

> Isn't that beautiful? she says. Now she's looking at me like I'm a wonder, like I just made magic happen. What language is that? she says. I tell her, and she tells me it's beautiful again, and I tell her thank you. Then she asks me what country I'm from and I tell her. It's beautiful over there, isn't it? I nod even though I don't know why I'm nodding. I just do. To this lady, maybe everything is beautiful (174–175).

This isolates my two main questions—is everything really beautiful to this white woman or is it just Darling's racially marked African identity that she finds beautiful? A close reading of the white woman's impression of Africa with Barbara Heron's book on humanitarianism as a colonial continuity (2007) deconstructs how the white woman's gaze is constructed along the line colonial racism. In deconstructing the commonplace white bourgeois helping imperative that is bestowed towards Africa, Heron makes clear that this attitude can be traced to white literature's commitment to a relational comparison between Africa and the West with the sole aim of designating the west as the center and asserting the superiority of Western people and their anointed obligation

to intervene globally (2007). One way this relational identity is maintained is "through the establishment of spatial difference" and the ascription of racial meanings vis-a-vis stereotyping tropes to the geographical spaces relegated to the outside of the center (2007, 56). Two of the standard stereotyping tropes—exoticism and imagined barbarity of Africa—as put forward by Heron is unequivocally portrayed by the white woman in Bulawayo's novel. The repeated use of the word 'beautiful' is contingent upon Darling's confirmation of her Black-African identity. As soon as this is confirmed, the process of differentiation is set in motion with such intensity that it leaves Darling mostly confused and complaisant. The woman proclaims Africa as beautiful, and Darling's language as beautiful even without knowing what language it is or which country she comes from in Africa. For her, proclaiming the African identity as beautiful is more impulsive than done with forethought. She has never been to Africa; neither does she need to have been there. Nevertheless, Africa is very much so familiar to her due to its everyday exotic presentations in Western culture. Africa for her is a world of contradictions—mysterious and at the same time familiar. As soon as her exoticism of Africa is done, she proceeds to another process of differentiation—magnify Africa as an uncivilized place where bad things happen.

> Africa is beautiful, she says, going on with her favourite word. But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? Just awful [...] Tell me about it. Jesus, the rapes, and all those killings! How can such things even be happening? she says [...] I mean, I can't even—I can't even process it. And all those poor women and children. I was watching CNN last night and there was this little girl who just—just too cute, she says [...] it just broke my heart, you know, the woman says, her voice choking (Bulawayo 175–176).

As soon as this nail is pounded onto the coffin of the imagined space of Africa, she launches into the final part, which brings into focus the relational part of whiteness that requires the discursive inferiorization of Africa for its own empowerment and proliferation. Her niece, who is championing an NGO cause, becomes the hero of the story, demonstrating the "relational constitution of white identities, which are both reaffirmed and challenged as they enter the terrain of the Other" (Heron 2007, 59).

> Now, Lisa up there, my niece, one of the bridesmaids, the tall one, real skinny red-head—she's going to Rwanda to help. She's in the Peace Corps, you know,

they are doing great things for Africa, just great, she says. I nod, even though I don't really know what the woman is talking about. But her face is looking much, much better, like the pain from earlier is going away. And last summer, she went to Khayelitsha in South Africa to teach at an orphanage, and let me tell you, we all donated—clothes and pens and medicines and crayons and candy for those poor African children. Then she puts her hand and closes her eyes briefly, like maybe she's listening to the throb of her kindness. I'm surprised by the way she says *Khayetlitsha*, says it so well, like maybe it's her language even. And, oh, she took such awesome pictures. You should have seen those faces! she says, and I look at her smiling face tilted upward now, catching the brilliant light, and I can see from it how the children's faces must have looked. They were smiling like she is smiling now. Then I'm seeing myself in this woman's face, there when we were in Paradise when the NGO people were taking our pictures (Bulawayo 176–177).

Indeed, this white woman's conversation with Darling, spotlights the belief of Darling that Africans are loved the most by white Americans. That white identity can only thrive in its relationship with Africa as the Other. That whiteness needs Africa for its own self-authorized civility symbolizes that the love shown to Africans is self-serving as it is intrusive. It also explains the white NGO workers' attitudes and how the images captured by the NGO workers and BBC reporters work in the service of whiteness to reinforce the racialized narratives about Africa that abound in the West. Sectioning the novel into two parts, and writing Darling, the character-bound narrator, to traverse these two parts, enables many hypotheses in the first part to be answered in the second part. For instance, we are granted within the narrative itself the chance to understand the importance of those pictures taken in Paradise. Godknows's Black buttocks, Chipo's pregnant belly, the children's torn clothing, their nutrient deprived bodies and the adults' crestfallen faces are visual imagery in the service of white supremacy, to highlight visual contrast with the West and elicit the exact sentiments displayed by the white woman. If for anything, Bulawayo shows dexterity at answering important social issues—at showing how so many of the social issues that impact the lives of postcolonial subjects and the ostensible liberatory responses to these issues are recycled through the foundational institution of white supremacy and colonialism that is committed to the culture of pathologizing African people and culture. Within this narrative dexterity, the white woman's emotional progression from euphoria to anguish and to relief also finds its significance. She, a product of whiteness, exceptionally executes the emotional spectrum that the images are designed for. First, eu-

phoria at coming in close contact with this overly represented Other, then anguish at the imagined barbarity of the space and culture this Other embodies or represents, and finally relief that they [white women] are doing something to combat this barbarity and infuse the social space with white-derived civility.

This brings me to the gendered subtext of the colonial hierarchical relations articulated in the development context. There is no denying that Bulawayo strongly interpolates gender into the subject matter of the dehumanization inflicted upon African people by Western folks. In one of the interviews on the novel, she confirms that gender as an intersection of imperial power dynamics constitutes a huge part of her writing process, and writing about women who occupy intertwined marginal spaces or "problematic spaces" as she classifies it is an intuitive labor that can be attributed to her own subjective history (Bulawayo n.d.). By placing women, both white and Black, in the narration of postcolonial and post-independence landscape, she uncovers how gender as an aspect of colonial social organization is deployed in the development context, to dominate and exert influence on colonized cultures and people. Even before the visit of the NGO workers to Paradise, the narration of an encounter between the children and a woman visiting for the first time from London signals the nature of relations initiated in the development context, and the agency wielded by women who are located in the West. Like the NGO workers, she has a camera dangling from her neck, which the children are very familiar with. The conversation, which ensues between the children and her, makes clear the sort of relations that is initiated "across the colonial divide" (Haggis 1998, 48). She comes out of a house in Budapest, chewing on some food. When the children ask about the food, she assumes that they are asking about the camera visibly displayed on her neck and proceeds to tell them that it is a camera. However, the children are very familiar with cameras: "[...], even a stone can tell that a camera is a camera" (Bulawayo 7). She asks if they do not mind their picture taken by her, and even when they do not answer her, because they are "not used to adults asking [them] anything" (8), she just carries on with taking their pictures in a manner suggesting that she received an affirmative response. When one of the children, disgruntled by this act, decides to walk away, her verbal reaction "Hey, where are you going?" (9), demonstrates her consideration of herself as superior in terms of social positioning. In addition, her action of capturing the children without caring about their consent is one of the ways this gendered superior positioning is realized in the development context.

According to Jane Haggis and Barbara Heron in their examination of the gendered aspect of whiteness in development context, white women or white female missionaries by virtue of their membership within the dominant group are positioned as actors and agents of civilization within the arena of development, and any attempt to rationalize their historical participation would portend dire consequences, such as the double oppression of Black women and double recuperation of white women (1998, 2007). In fact, Heron substantiates that it is the case that white women witness the development context as a quick fix to their own "strictures of normative constructions of white femininity" and subjugated positioning within their own Western culture, to the exclusion of disrupting their own "normative Northern gender constraints" back home (2007, 109–112). More so, the personification of white women as the gendered ideal of colonial patriarchal civilization has been instrumental in the pathologization of African women (Boittin 2015). Through their superior gendered positioning, Jawad Syed & Faiza Ali contend that white women have been able to carve out positions for themselves in the public realm of power, which sees to modern development projects and ultimately endorse themselves as white feminist benefactors and saviors of oppressed Black women (2011).

Following this elaboration, the gendered aspect of whiteness becomes quite evident in Bulawayo's novel vis-a-vis the female visitor from London, the NGO female workers and the white woman's niece who travels to Rwanda as a member of the Peace Corp. Predominantly characterizing white female characters' presence in the development context is an attempt to show that white women in fact play a huge role in the historical to contemporary Otherness of Indigenous women. The NGO top workers, consisting of two white women and the white woman's niece, Lisa, demonstrate that in contrary to the white feminist ubiquitous narrative of gender inequality that pervades the global scene, white women by virtue of their race privilege are able to transcend the colonial gender binary that is present in the development context, and "carve out a career *per se* in modern development projects (e.g gender equality and gender empowerment in Asia and Africa) (Syed & Ali 2011, 357). They, unenlightened about and unaffected by the internal socio-political disruption follow in the footsteps of colonial patriarchal ethos, which sees them becoming "active agents and partners in post-colonial agendas and strategies of developing and civilizing the third world" (361) and sumptuously making themselves the heroes of the story, as we witness in the white woman's narrative of her niece's volunteering in Rwanda.

The white woman's narration of her niece's volunteering jobs across the African continent, when placed side by side the women of Paradise's dissatisfaction with the tokens brought to them by the NGO workers and MotherLove's rejection, reveals the polarities in the Western pro-humanitarian institutions and postcolonial welfare recipients. It shows that these white feminist volunteering and donations do not translate into any remarkable transformation in African women's socioeconomic condition. Instead, it exposes the problematic contribution of white women to the enrichment of the institution of white humanitarianism. With references such as rapes, killings, poor African children, suppressed African women etc., the white woman successfully renders the African continent as a unanimously barbaric misogynistic space, into which her niece by virtue of her gender identity is courageous to intervene, and her donations of "clothes and pens and medicines and crayons and candy for those poor African children" (Bulawayo 176) through her niece is fundamental to the social, economic and political liberation of the African people, especially children and women. The effect of such diametrically opposed narrative is that it successfully diminishes the complexity of the predicaments of previously colonized countries, Others the African women living in that geographical area, and ultimately positions them (white women) as heroic figures, without whose intervention African women and children would be trapped in their abject state. Within this diametrically opposed gendered narrative favored by white humanitarian ethos, MotherLove's noncompliance, and rejection of the NGO's token of charity also finds meaning. Her rejection of the white women's charity exemplifies Black feminist or Africana feminist rejection of white Eurocentric feminist movement due to its lack of intersectionality and prioritizing gender issues over other struggles faced by women of African descent that lead back to slavery and colonialism (hooks 1981, Crenshaw 1989&1995, Collins 2000, Hudson-Weems 2020).

Under the influence of this diatribe, Africa becomes this ubiquitous representation of backwardness and futility, while America and Europe become the overarching signifier of unlimited potentials, abundance, and freedom. The white-centered European orientation to life that underpins and has become enmeshed with the postcolonial conventionalities and educational structure prevails upon and ensnares the vulnerable postcolonial subjects. The postcolonial subjects inundated by this white supremacist mindset decide to leave their country and everything behind and migrating to America —the land of abundant opportunities. The postcolonial subjects' wish to migrate I postulate is a visceral wish that is engendered by the "historical realities of hegemony and

ethnocentrism by Western cultures and the accompanying atrocities of slavery, colonialism and oppression" (Hudson-Weems 2020, 3). However, on getting to America, they soon realize that their dreams of freedom and abundance would not happen, at least not for them by virtue of their social identities. Darling, who Bulawayo uses to expose the struggles of migrants from development environs, would end up not continuing with her education to the university, neither would she be able to visit her home country. Like her Aunt Fostalina, she ends up working several shifts at several odd jobs after school hours. We find out that like many others, her immigrant visa comes with severe restrictions.

This commonality of third world migrants' despair in the US is captured in the entirety of the chapter entitled "How They Lived". The narrative voice, shifting from the personal pronoun 'I' to the collective pronoun 'we' serves as a way to capture this commonality of immigration travails of third world people that stems from white supremacist structures. No doubt, there are plenty of privileges in the shape of American consumerism culture and possibilities to settle into a new global identity, African immigrants nevertheless find themselves imprisoned by the anti-Blackness that is fundamental to Western culture and nationalism. Restricted by their visa, they have to relinquish their lofty dreams and work at exploitative hazardous jobs that do not demand work permits.

> And the jobs we worked, Jesus—Jesus—Jesus, the jobs we worked. Low-paying jobs. Backbreaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow. We took scalding irons and ironed our pride flat. We cleaned toilets. We picked tobacco and fruit under the boiling sun until we hung our tongues and panted like lost hounds. We butchered animals, slit throats, drained blood. We worked with dangerous machines, holding our breath like crocodiles underwater, our minds on the money and never on our lives. Adamou got murdered by that beast of a machine that also ate three fingers of Sudan's left hand. We cut ourselves working on meat; we got skin diseases. We inhaled bad smells until our lungs thundered. Ecuador fell from forty stories working on a roof and shattered his spine, screaming, ¡Mis hijos! ¡Mis hijos! on his way down. We got sick but we did not go to hospitals, could not go to hospitals. We swallowed every pain like a bitter pill, drank every fear like a love potion, and we worked and worked (Bulawayo 244).

Ngom notes that Darling's struggles in the USA serves as a way for Bulawayo to foreground "the universality of poverty as well as suffering" and show that "even in the nations of cutting-edge development, there are pockets of poverty"

and migration to the west is not a guaranteed solution to the hopelessness in the postcolonial world (2020, 17). While I agree with Ngom, I add that Darling's struggles also serves as a way for Bulawayo to unmask the diametrically opposed narrative for what it is—an invention of whiteness to continue the exploitation of African people for their own socio-economic privileges. In the US, as seen through Darling's migration, the condition of migrants from previously colonized countries do not undergo any positive transformation. Instead, they end up in riskier jobs. The fact that there are jobs available for them demonstrates that the West needs and thrives on workers like them. Their undocumented status and visa restrictions endows them with fewer and lesser rights, thus creating a category of vulnerable workers with horrendous work and life conditions. They endure myriads of abuses and are scared to access the abundant privileges like health care even when they are in desperate need of it.

This in itself is a mockery of the Euro-American humanitarian projects being carried out in the development contexts. Under the nation-state governing immigration policy, the migrants in *We Need New Names* metamorphose into illegals, condemned to silence and invisibility. By showing what these postcolonial migrants endure in these professed countries of freedom and abundance, we are able to see that there is nothing emancipating about the Euro-American nationalist policies, at least for some select group of people. Ultimately, what they are able to escape is a continent crumbling under the constellation of colonial oppressive institutions of the past and postcolonial metamorphosis. Their life not particularly changing for the better as they hope it would in the US—fountainhead of humanitarian projects—unmasks the intent of consumption that is behind white humanitarian projects on the African continent.

> When they debated what to do with illegals, we stopped breathing, stopped laughing, stopped everything, and listened. We heard: exporting America, broken borders, war on the middle class, invasion, deportation, illegals, illegals, illegals. We bit our tongues till we tasted blood, sat tensely on one cheek, afraid to sit on both because how can you sit properly when you don't know about your tomorrow? And because we were illegal and afraid to be discovered we mostly kept to ourselves, stuck to our kind and shied away from those who were not like us. We did not know what they think of us, what they would do about us. We did not want their wrath, we did not want their curiosity, we did not want any attention. We did not meet stares and avoid gazes. We hid our real names, gave false ones when asked. We built moun-

tains between us and them, we dug rivers, we planted thorns—we had paid so much to be in America and we did not want to lose it all (Bulawayo 242).

Plainly, the African migrants' subjection, already set in motion by (post)colonial power mechanisms in their home countries reach a completion in the west. However, they choose to continue to stay with the hope that things could positively transform for them, and they could one day become members of this elevated group of civilization and beneficiaries of their civil liberties: "We stayed, like prisoners, only we chose to be prisoners and we loved our prison; it was not a bad prison. And when things only got worse in our country, we pulled our shackles even tighter and said, We are not leaving America, no, we are not leaving" (247). Their total subjection, which is played out in their informed choice to be prisoners in the West, I argue is an effect of the "processes of Othering" initiated, repeatedly articulated, and implanted into their consciousness by the dominant West (Heron 2007, 57). Whatever the situation might be for these postcolonial immigrants, they are finally in the homestead of civilization and will continue in their struggle to change their status from nobody to somebody, from illegal to documented, from outsider to insider, from people with no rights to people with rights.

Finally, for African women who are caught in the postcolonial, multicultural web of intersectional dominance, they find themselves in a contradictory situation that reflects their unique subordinating positioning betwixt the ideological conventions of nation-states. They do not find emancipation anywhere, neither in their home country nor abroad. Their dispossession is sandwiched by gendered racisms of colonialism and patriarchal articulations of nationhood. They are reminded of their layered disenfranchisement, as Africans, women, African migrants, and African women. This layered dispossession and disenfranchisement overpowers the newly relocated Darling, and she begs to visit her hometown, even if for only two weeks. Of course, this is impossible because her tourist visa is expired and to leave is to not be able to re-enter America. For her Aunt Fostalina, who has lived in the United States for longer, her sandwiched disenfranchisement is even more evident. Even while working several jobs to finish paying for the house she purchased in Zimbabwe for her sister, the patriarchal articulations of nationalism in her home country continues to taunt her in the US. In the same scene where Darling pleads to visit her home country, she also narrates the different reactions her Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo expressed towards a broadcast on BBC from the president of their country about how their country is "a black man's home and would never be

a colony again and what-what" (Bulawayo 192). While this broadcast instantly puts Aunt Fostalina in a state of rage that she snatches up the remote and turns off the TV, Uncle Kojo on the other hand shows elation at this nationalist sentiment that he turns the TV back on and screams in solidarity "Tell them, Mr. President, tell these bloody colonists" (193).

The President's broadcast vis-a-vis Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo's dissimilar reactions illustrates my exhaustive analysis of the gendered nature of postcolonial nationalism. The president's depiction of the country in masculinist term reveals the centrality of the subordination of women to the postcolonial project of nationalism. The resort to violence and coercion by the postcolonial nation-state in their assertion of independence from colonial domination, I argue, is a by-product of the patriarchal orientation of nationalism adopted from their colonial predecessors. These nationalist movements competing for dominance, which has culminated in the severe disorganization of African societies and the massive migration of its people, portend dire consequences for African women, in that they are assigned second-class citizenship in this postcolonial project of independence and self-governance. Therefore, while Uncle Kojo, by virtue of his gender positioning, is able to feel a semblance of elation at the empowering sentiments of self-governance, Aunt Fostalina, by virtue of her marginalization by these competing powers, is only able to abhor this postcolonial nationalist project. The women's relegation to a second-class status in this post-independence era is a gross betrayal of their active participation in nationalist struggles alongside men, for independence from colonial patriarchal domination.

In the cosmopolitan novels *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference* respectively, the everyday moderate to fatal discriminatory realities faced by the postcolonial African immigrant subject irrespective of class and gender is exhaustively narrated. However, given that the experiences of social issues can widely diverge as a result of overlapping social identities and positionalities, the novels prove themselves as Black feminist materials, with their plots following how race, gender, class, visa-privilege and citizenship amidst many other social identities, shape migration projects embarked upon by postcolonial African subjects. Alongside the theme of migration, the gendered-racialization of humanitarian projects and expertise, which this chapter meticulously deconstructs, is also given due attention. While *Americanah*, a novel with a complex narrative structure, and diverse thematic preoccupations rooted in colonial racial stratification, manages to include the theme of white humanitarianism, *A Bit of Difference* follows the professional life of a middle-class

Nigerian female migrant who works for an NGO in the UK. In totality, what is particularly powerful about my consideration of these two novels is that their representations of class-privileged postcolonial African migrant characters in juxtaposition with the representations of class-marginalized characters *On Black Sisters' Street* and *We Need New Names*, bring to light a connecting thread in the transatlantic, transcultural, and transnational moderate to fatal struggle of postcolonial African subjects. And that thread is the history of colonial domination, condoned atrocities and misrepresentations that betray the global benefits of anti-Blackness or anti-Africanness. If anything, the struggles of class-privileged African migrants in the global north reveal that it is almost impossible for any postcolonial African subject to escape the looming shadow of their colonial-inflicted diminutive status in the global order.

In *Americanah*, under the urging of her Aunt Uju who is already residing in America, Ifemelu finds herself half-heartedly applying to universities in America due to the prolonged strike actions of the Nigerian university teachers protesting neo-colonial failed leadership. In America, Ifemelu is thrust into a race-polarizing environment, which she has to expeditiously familiarize herself with. Coming from a country with its own social issues of bad governance, corruption, insurgency, nepotism, zero maintenance culture for infrastructures, sexism etc., but where racial segregation is a long forgotten social vice due to the unique history of colonial independence, she is a stranger to this system of racial hierarchy as a deciding factor for opportunities and humanizing norms. Thus, she ends up joining her Aunt Uju and many other African migrants and African American people in the enduring discourse of how colonial racial capitalism and anti-Blackness continue to negatively contour their humanity. Reflecting on Ifemelu's process of settlement vis-a-vis her college activities, curriculum, job hunting and interviews that introduce her to the deeply embedded racialized-gendered caste system and bring her in close proximity to whiteness and trope of Otherness will illuminate the power structures that frame the frontiers of humanity, belonging and legitimacy. Who gets to belong? Who gets to be protected from forms of sanctioned violence? Who has claims to visibility, human right, and freedom? These are all the questions that are answered by Ifemelu's broad encounter with the American system as a Black female migrant.

First, her introduction to the American job market is expedited by seasoned African immigrant students she meets through the "African Students Association" (170). As soon as they inspect her resumé, they immediately tell her to delete the three years of university education she had in Nigeria, because

"American employers did not like lower-level employees to be too educated" (171). Her optimism soon turns into disappointment with her inability to find a student job. As weeks turn into months and bills continue to accumulate, her disappointment turns into trepidation at the sanctioned consequences that go together with her nonfeasance. One of the strategies she quickly learns is that if she wants to survive as an African immigrant with visa limitations, she needs to familiarize herself with the strategy of impersonation or mimicry. From acquiring a fake identity card and impersonating a Ngozi Okonkwo to switching between an African and American accents, when necessary, Ifemelu does it all and still does not get a job. Gradually, the American environment takes its toll on her, and she loses her individuality like her Aunt Uju who she had impatiently judged when she arrived in America. Most importantly, however, is the attention that Adichie brings to power differentials and how it borders the concept of consent. Writing the protagonist as a young educated middle-class African woman, who is equipped with the language and theoretical repertoire to examine complex identity discourse and form her own reasoned opinions, turn out to be useful even in this dangerous situation. By first declining and then returning to accept his offer, she knows that the power balance has been tilted in his favor and she would have no choice but to succumb to whatever his demands were. What we see here is a young promising woman who is stripped of whatever individuality and feminist consciousness she brings with her to the United States, and forced into new sets of marginalization that are dictated by the enduring process of colonial differentiation. With her student visa on the line, she is left with little to no choice. She must perform her identity in alignment with the Western perspective of Africa as subpar and available to be consumed in disenfranchising ways.

Through her friend, she later gets a job as a babysitter with Kimberly and Laura, two white women (sisters) who are looking to replace their babysitters. Kimberly is described as owning a charity. This choice of professional portfolio, I argue is not serendipitous. This is a common thread in three of the four novels analyzed in this chapter, which goes to demonstrate the extent of the involvement of the West in Africa and how severely gendered this sociocultural and capitalist phenomenon has become. This brings back Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali's argument that white privilege visibly runs through white humanitarian operations in the modern development contexts, and the gendered aspect of whiteness means that white women are able to benefit from the imperialistic ambitions pursued by white men. Their argument that in quest for their own share of empowerment, white women have over the years been able to make a career

for themselves within this imperial bureaucratic structure that inspires their own sensibility of superiority (2011), is in line with Adichie's, Atta's and Bulawayo's fictional narratives. Thus, the interaction between Ifemelu and Kimberly mirrors the interaction between Darling and the white female wedding guest in *We Need New Names* already analyzed above, and Deola's interaction with her white female boss in *A Bit of Difference*, which will be analyzed later in the chapter.

As soon as Ifemelu introduces herself, Kimberly instantly launches into one of the Western-instituted processes of differentiation (Heron 2007), which re-establishes her hegemonic superiority as it exoticizes the Other. In an eerily similar way with the white woman's commentaries in *We Need New Names*, Kimberly comments on everything related to Africa as beautiful. From Ifemelu's name, to her culture, to the wonderful organic food that Ifemelu must have been lucky to eat growing up, to the Black women she works with in her charity organization, and random Black women gracing the cover of magazines. Ifemelu of course realizes that the point of convergence for all these 'beautiful' people and things in Kimberly's life are their ties to Africanness. For Kimberly, Africa is conceived of as poor and unsophisticated in its poverty, so could never be more blameless and child-like. She proclaims her love for multicultural names because "they have such wonderful meanings, from wonderful rich cultures", repeats that Ifemelu has "such a beautiful name" even though she cannot pronounce it correctly, shows Ifemelu pictures of Indigenous people who "[have] nothing, absolutely nothing, but [are] so happy", casually mentions that she is involved with "a really good charity in Malawi" and becomes misty-eyed at the wishful thinking that she is in no position to do more than she is already doing for Africa (Adichie 180–185). Don, her husband, who returns home mid interview, also ironically remarks that "[they] do [their] best but [they] know very well that [they're] not messiahs" (185).

Like Darling in *We Need New Names*, Ifemelu is pigeonholed into this social space of Otherness, and she is left feeling "sorry to have come from Africa, to be the reason that this beautiful woman, with her bleached teeth and bounteous hair, would have to dig deep to feel such pity, such hopelessness" (185). Therefore, she resorts to smiling in order to make her feel better, thus elevating white comfort over her own obvious devalued subjectivity. Ifemelu's recourse to smiling is a perfect illustration of what Heron refers to as the power of "differential affluence" (2007, 85). According to Heron, the effect of differential affluence on both Black and white implicated subjects is that the subordinate's awareness of power differentials reproduces a range of relational dynamics

that end up masking the dominant group's racism (2007). Adichie's contriving of Ifemelu as an impassioned observant African feminist character however comes in handy as it furnishes her with the skill necessary to deconstruct this quotidian inter-racial interaction. Even in her desperation for a job offer, Ifemelu is able to carry the reader along in her astute evaluation of the subtexts of Kimberly's valuation. In one instance, she points out that Kimberly would certainly not ascribe rich culture to countries like Norway, because 'culture' serves as a linguistic demarcation for the strange exoticized African continent, just as beautiful is a linguistic marker to segregate the Black body. Tweaking her identity and self-expression to appeal to Kimberly and Laura is also another way Ifemelu displays her cultural astuteness. This takes the shape of making relational comparisons between the United States and Nigeria that corroborates Kimberly and Laura's relational superiority. At the same time that Kimberly exoticizes Africa, Laura, her sister, launches into the alternate stereotyping trope—the imagined barbarity of Africa (Heron 2007). She uses Ifemelu's reason for leaving Nigeria to reify the debauchery of the entirety of Africa and gives a rejoinder to her sister that Ifemelu's relocation to the US can only come from a place of scarcity that has its grips on Africa, so it cannot be the case that organic food products would have been accessible to her in Nigeria. For her, Africa is a "zone of degeneracy" and the prolonged university professors' strike in Nigeria serves as proof of this (Heron 2007, 60). Even when Laura is aware of the fact that Ifemelu's migration from Nigeria is for specific educational reason and not poverty, her response "Horrible, what's going on in African countries" (Adichie 181) shows her perception of the African continent as indistinguishable in its splendor of horror. To Laura's rejoinder, Kimberly replies that even if Ifemelu's home country had very little food as alleged by Laura, then it must be organic vegetables and not genetically modified food like the one they have in the USA. The two sisters' dialogue is an exposé on the "reciprocal connection" of these two commonplace simultaneous exotic and barbaric tropes (2007, 57). By pairing the imagery of organic and scarcity at the same time in comparison to the USA's technological abundance, they ensure that Ifemelu, and by extension Africa, would not be able to escape the narrative of contrasting inferiority. Because without this pejorative subtext, the white savior and humanitarian trope suffers the risk of undoing. And this, as the novel suggests, is a profitable cycle Laura, Kimberly and Don are very invested in and cannot afford to have neutralized.

After Ifemelu gets the babysitting job, Laura's compulsion to maintain Ifemelu's contrasting inferiority to them heightens. Ifemelu's babysitting job

is constantly interrupted with Laura's "aggressive, unaffectionate interest" of confronting her with maledictive information that confirms her bias about Nigeria, and by extension Africa (Adichie 201). Alongside her maledictive information are vignettes of white humanitarian endeavors in Africa. Stories about internet frauds, the Nigerian economy being bolstered by the money sent home by Nigerians living abroad, Nigerian migrants declared as the most educated immigrant group in the US that says nothing about the true state of the majority whose lives are marred by poverty back in Nigeria and many more. Her new-found hobby leaves Kimberly apologizing on her behalf to Ifemelu. Ifemelu, thrust into this micro-aggressive environment, cannot help but wonder if Laura's hobby is simply to spite a mellowed Kimberly. Ifemelu's reflection on Laura's obsession, especially in light of her established distaste for Africa, allows for a nuanced deconstruction. I argue that Laura's obsession is due to Ifemelu's educational class status. With her middle-class African belonging and educational status in the US, Laura's superior sensibility is at risk of neutralization. The only way to keep the "differential affluence" in place is to continuously feed the narrative of a barbaric African identity (Heron 2007, 85). Furthermore, this pairing of barbaric Africa and white humanitarianism by Laura amplifies her right to negate Ifemelu's middle-class subjectivity, a class identity that is negated by her African identity, and, in summary, does not fit into the Western inscription of Africa.

At a house party hosted by Kimberly and Don, once again, Ifemelu is confronted with narratives of white humanitarian activities in Africa. The guests' interactions with her do not go beyond an objectifying subordinated level. A man who comments on her beauty, immediately follows it up with "African women are gorgeous, especially Ethiopians" (Adichie 209), thus Othering African women, and treating them as a homogeneous cluster with no subjectivity. For this white man, Ifemelu's female and African identity makes her available for his unsolicited evaluation, and whatever gendered sensibilities that might exist in the US do not apply to her. She is not a guest but a symbol of inferiority. After this, the topic of charities is immediately referenced. They all mention their charitable efforts towards Africa. One couple pays for the education of a tour guide's daughter who they met on their visit to Tanzania. Two women give donations to charities in various African countries like Malawi, Kenya, and Botswana. Another woman mentions that she is the chair of a board of charity in Ghana and would be interested in employing Ifemelu as a Native staff to work in Africa. This shows how the trope of "differential affluence" pursued by white people is deeply enmeshed with dehumanizing

anti-Black rhetoric (Heron 2007, 85). It is not only the case that whiteness is dependent on the discursive representation of Africans as inferior, but all it requires is the presence of an African to set that process in motion. One also cannot help but notice the gendered interface of an enduring imperial system, which has white women occupying governing positions of these charities and validating their authority to interfere in development contexts.

Adichie does not only make Ifemelu the center of the novel, as we witness other Nigerian migrant characters who experience their own share of disenfranchising migration horrors both in the US and UK. The male protagonist and Ifemelu's high school boyfriend, Obinze, migrates to the UK for better career opportunities that are taking too long to realize in Nigeria. His migration route puts him in a far worse situation than Ifemelu. The attention given to Obinze is equally vital, as it illuminates the disenfranchised horrors faced by postcolonial subjects who follow undocumented migration routes. For Obinze who is given the nickname 'American expert' because of his impassioned knowledge for everything American, travelling to the UK is his least desirable choice. However, after getting several visa rejections from the American embassy for unexplained reasons, his unwavering plan begins to waver. His inability to get a job even with his exceptional grade makes things worse and he falls into a state of apathy. His upstanding professor mother, in a bid to alleviate his mental anguish, goes against her incorruptible principles, and puts his name on her British visa application as her research assistant. Once his six months visa expires, he becomes an undocumented immigrant, who must stay invisible and impersonate other identities for work. On the verge of getting married for citizenship, however, he is apprehended by the immigration police and deported back to Nigeria. Several facts and speculations narrated in Obinze's plot present possibilities for reflection on how postcolonial subjects are stifled by colonial race-based structures of discrimination and oppression. First is the speculation of his mother on his failed attempts to get an American visa, despite fulfilling every qualification: "It's the terrorism fears […], The Americans are now averse to foreign young men" (Adichie 289). Obinze's mother, a vastly educated and travelled woman, does not arrive at this conclusion flippantly. The Sani Abacha military regime of 1993–1998, which shook Nigeria to the core, was known for its brutality, sweeping violation of human rights and corruption that greatly benefitted Europe (Britannica, 2021). Worthy of mention is also the fact that Abacha's tyrannical style of governance can be traced to military training colleges established by the British (2021). This tense political period sees Obinze through his university education

and graduation into a nepotistic job market that is unfavorable to him and his forthright mother. Young and old skilled people, frustrated by the despotic rulership, opt for migrating to Canada and America, culminating in a migration spike and an unmasking of discriminatory visa regulations. Obinze's mother's speculation, within this supplemental background, contextualizes for readers how colonial racial-gendered profiling is intrinsic to Eurocentric nationalism and citizenship. In the American embassy, Obinze's identity constellation supersedes his excellent qualifications, and his visa application is refused on the possibility that he might be a potential threat to America.

In London, Obinze's undocumented status nullifies any agency he possessed and privileged class he belonged to prior to his migration. He realizes that in order to survive, he needs to quickly learn and adopt the tricks of people with this non-person status. Like Ifemelu, he impersonates the identities of documented migrants in order to be able to work, with the condition that he remits thirty-five percent of whatever income earned. With these identity cards, he is able to find hazardous jobs that have little to no identity scrutiny, but however leaves a debilitating mark on his migrant identity. His everyday reality serves as a backdrop to other stories of disenfranchised postcolonial characters living and working in the UK. We meet his cousin Nicholas and wife Ojiugo, who once upon a time in Nsukka were the most popular and brightest students respectively. Migrant life has sobered them up so much that their non-gendered pre-migrant relationship has undergone significant transformation. Nicholas, once a thrill-seeker is now a subdued husband and father who works all week and spends his weekends "[walking] around the house in a tense cloud of silence, nursing his fears" (296). Ojiugo, once a vibrant non-conforming student and research assistant to Obinze's mother, is now a full-on housewife, enthusiastically committed to her children and subdued husband. When Obinze, a newcomer to the postcolonial migrant scene, attempts to remind them of their pre-migrant empowered identities, Ojiugo's light-hearted response makes clear that the transformation of their individual identities is attributable to none other than the toll of their migratory journey. We meet a few of Obinze's university classmates, whom he calls to socialize with. All of them, university graduates, have become less ambitious and low-spirited. The only happy memories they have to share with one another are their pre-migrant memories. They particularly avoid talking about their present lives in London. We also meet one of Obinze's high school classmates, Emenike, whose nickname was "sharp" because of his restless strive for success and class upgrade. His migratory journey in England is described as successful, but one

cannot help but see the chunk of agency and dignity his seat at the table of whiteness has taken from him. He is described as married to a white woman, and highly aware of white superiority, so much so that even his mockery of his wife in her absence is "colored by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior" (326). We see a character who is inundated with so much mental conflict about himself and his African identity and feels the need to compensate for his internalized inferiority. He constantly represents Nigeria as a jungle his white wife needs protection from and fore-warns Obinze not to talk about his intending duplicitous marriage with her. In addition, he is characterized as having dual social identities, one that is on full display as soon as he meets with Obinze and the other he reserves for a white presence.

While it is established that people have and alternate amongst multiple social identities based on their group memberships, I argue that Black people within the context of a global identity are more predisposed to having a fractured social identity because of their subjugated positioning. For Emenike, this fractured social identity shows up in his behavior, speech, cultural standpoints, and race rhetoric. His impassioned delivery of racial issues and personal experiences of racism in London assumes a subdued tone in the presence of his wife and adopted white friends. He participates in the trope of exoticism, and comments on a plate as beautiful because they are handmade by rural women in India. When asked by his wife to narrate a racial incidence to their white friends, his delivery is cleansed of all the rage his account of the same story to Obinze carried. In place of the rage he claimed to have felt is a substitute of some sort of "superior amusement" about the incident (Adichie 341). Obinze cannot help but notice that in the midst of his white friends, "the temperature of his [Emenike] entire being [is] much lower" (330). In all, we see a character, who is so reduced by colonial racial structures, and so aware that his seat at the table of affluence is contingent on his conformity to white ways of being, and on not making his adopted white friends uncomfortable with his embittered experiences of racial injustice.

Like Ifemelu who is subjected to objectifying and dehumanizing discussions at Kimberly's party, Obinze also has to relive similar discussion in Emenike's friendly gathering. One of the white guests, Alexa, in fact discloses to everyone that her current involvement is with a "fantastic charity that's trying to stop the UK from hiring so many African health workers" because the migration pull is leaving the African continent without professionals (338). She is of the strong opinion that "African doctors should stay in Africa" to

which another white guest, Mark responds, "I'm from Grimsby and I certainly don't want to work in a district hospital there" (338). Alexa responds, "But it isn't quite the same thing, is it? We're speaking of some of the world's poorest people. The doctors have a responsibility as Africans [...] Life isn't fair, really. If they have the privilege of that medical degree then it comes with a responsibility to help their people" (338). To which Mark counters, "I see. I don't suppose any of us should have that responsibility for the blighted towns in the north of England?" (338). In this episode, Adichie highlights the intersection of white humanitarianism, white superiority, and anti-Blackness. By contrasting the value judgement of a white person's choice to migrate with that of a Black person, Adichie shows how "positional superiority" operates, and grants subjectivity to whiteness in the way it does not to Blackness (Heron 2007, 63). Under the myth of white supremacy, whiteness presents the African continent as a silenced homogenous entity that is lacking in agency. Under this myth, whiteness also decides the terms of humanitarian engagements in the development context as well as the terms of migration of African people to the west. Alexa's superiority would have her believe that her charity work is for the benefit of vulnerable poor people the African continent is overflowing with, on whose behalf she must speak. What her critique does, like any other critique of structural injustice that does not begin with the positionality of whiteness on the global hierarchy, is address the aftermath without undoing the system itself, which predictably privileges her and other white people. At the end of the gathering, the omniscient narrator captures the absolute lack of subjectivity that the African continent and middle-class people like Ifemelu and Obinze are implicated in, as well as the only context (of war and poverty) in which the right of migration is obtaining for Africans:

> Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from, birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty (Adichie, 341).

As already mentioned above, I contend that Adichie's middle-class characters' perspective illuminates the colonial race-based oppression that links every postcolonial migrant. I argue that while the migration path (documented vs undocumented), class influenced or not, may potentially reduce the weight of anti-Black peculiarity of Western structures, postcolonial subjects ultimately cannot escape their racialized-gendered Othered identities, hence will suffer heavily as a result.

In *A Bit of* Difference, the female protagonist, Deola, is introduced to us as a middle-aged Nigerian woman, with a British citizenship who works for an NGO, LINKS, in London. Atta's attention to the race-based distinctive realities of postcolonial migrant subjects outside of whatever class privilege they are in possession of echoes throughout the novel, as she carefully frames an upper Nigerian/migrant middle-class character who is in everyday working proximity with white women. The omniscient narrator's disclosure that this upper-class Nigerian protagonist would "probably have got down on her knees at the Home Office and begged had her application [for a British passport] been denied" is a testament of her migration subjectivity, which is independent of her upper-class identity, peripheral Nigerian identity and lastly, a foreshadow of the colonial race-based degradations that is to come (Atta 7). Deola's work relationship with her colleagues is stilted because of her consciousness of the positional difference between her and her white female colleagues. For this reason, she is given to perpetual introspection of the power dynamics that surrounds even the tiniest of their everyday evaluation of the humanitarian projects embarked upon by her firm. Through her top position as a director of internal audits, we witness, in an elaborate manner, the covert racialization of expertise in this fictional contemporary humanitarian aid sector (Bian 2022). In addition, we witness how the gendered aspect of whiteness plays out in the organization structure of the Western institutions that intervene in the humanitarian crises in postcolonial African countries, with white women constituting the majority of the employees in LINK. There is a visible racialized power hierarchy embedded into the job specifications and administrative privileges, which eventually leads to the protagonist's decision to resign from the job. While all the characters are represented as employees with required certifications to lead in their various job capacities, Deola is clearly on a lower rank for no reason other than her racialized identity. Hence, her knowledgeable evaluation of the prevailing issues in the development context carries no weight in the final decision-making. These power dynamics in the organization structure of LINKS makes it conceivable to construe that the protagonist's employment might ironically be

connected to her racialized identity, a conclusion that the protagonist herself reaches before her resignation.

On one of her work visits to the American branch, a conversation with Anna, her white colleague, and the director of international affairs, captures the "processes of differentiation" that is crucial to LINKS's continuation and its implication for Deola's valuation within said company (Heron 2007, 56). At the level of representation, LINKS for Anna is a structure that brings relief into the development context, without which the vulnerable African people would suffer immeasurably. For Anna, there is not a doubt that there exist two categories—the empowered and the powerless, which the NGO aims to bridge, and whatever discerning criticism Deola might have about LINKS's racialized disposition that has constrained her from overseeing a program in Nigeria is best directed elsewhere: "Oh, I'm not so sure about that. It's the government they [LINKS] don't trust, but it's a shame to hold NGOs responsible for that. I mean, they are just trying to raise funds for … for these people, who really don't need to be punished anymore than they already have" (Atta 7). In contrast to the other novels, which have the African female characters positioned completely outside white humanitarian's workspace, Deola's dual positionality, as a racialized individual and an aid professional, offers a unique category of analysis and distinctive assessment. Despite Anna's opinion, it is no doubt that Deola's reflection on her workplace impediment comes from a subjective experience of navigating a society that is given to narratives of "centre and periphery" (Heron 2007, 55). This reflection also ironically manifests in her mindfulness to discontinue this short moment of frankness with Anna, and steer the conversation into a different, but safe subject matter that will not cause any rancor. While Anna's de-racialized identity allows her to effortlessly re-establish her dominance and maintain an unspoken boundary, Deola has another moment of introspection on Anna's use of "these people" (Atta 7). It is evident that Anna does not include Deola in this powerless category. Nevertheless, such "processes of differentiation" has dire implication for Deola's visibility and role within the company, as we will see later in the novel (Heron 2007, 56). Deola's non-recognition is concurrent with Junru Bian's argument that while local staff members are vital to the operational success of humanitarian endeavors and are likewise valued in this regard, their local knowledge does not "translate to them being trusted with making administrative decisions based on their local knowledge to anchor future trajectories of their organisations" (2022, 6). This demonstrates the irony of the humanitarian aims and objectives to empower the powerless. If local staff members cannot

advance beyond their local low level support positions to high-ranking policy-making positions, then it stands to reason that the narrative of humanitarian altruism provided to postcolonial societies is itself riddled with colonial racial ideals that will certainly not bring African people to their apex of liberation.

Deola's devaluation is made more evident when she is tasked to travel to Nigeria to assess the legitimacy of two potential local NGO beneficiaries. She ends up recommending only one of the two, and for reasons of irregularities, which her local knowledge empowers her to recognize, refuses to recommend the second. Nevertheless, the other white administrative employees, who happen to be one or two levels above her, and possess administrative power, dismiss her recommendation. Of significance yet again is how the polarity of her position shows up in the course of carrying out her job in the Nigerian space. As a racialized humanitarian aid worker, Deola faces subtle disapproval from the local counterparts. A conflict between her racialized powerless identity and proximity to whiteness is instantly detected. At the same time that she is subjected to colonial racialized attitudes in the humanitarian workplace that limits her advancement, she experiences some form of subtle resentment from the local NGO workers until her proximity to the Western humanitarian institution is established. In one of the NGOs, the local female director, Mrs Nwachukwu, goes as far as showing her displeasure to Deola's polar identity. However, the director's reaction is not a once-off situation, as this is a predictable reaction Deola has repeatedly experienced within local spaces: "Predictably, Mrs Nwachukwu is noticeably offended, taking in Deola's pearl earrings, black linen dress and pumps as if the overall understated effect is a plot to undermine her flamboyant, traditional look" (Atta 124). She goes ahead to blow off Deola's offer of togetherness, and immediately lets her know she is in direct communication with her counterpart in London, or would rather confer with a white person: "Kate Meade is your director, eh? She says, stroking her gold pendant. Yes. I've been communicating with Kate Meade" (124). This rejoinder I argue is for the purpose of stripping Deola of any power her ascribed white leadership position bestows upon her and put her in her rightful place of racialized powerlessness. So, rather than be empowered by her local knowledge to find sustainable solutions to the perpetual crises of postcolonial African societies, her profession as an aid expert, while being a Black woman, inversely puts her in a quandary. Whatever expertise she possesses is inundated by her racialized-gendered identity and Deola finds herself repeatedly proving her certified skill both home and abroad without success.

On her arrival to London and presentation of her findings, she discovers that Mrs. Nwachukwu true to her words has reached out to Kate and insisted on meeting her personally. Deola, true to her detached character does not open up to Kate that Mrs. Nwachukwu considers her a more worthy peer to deliberate with because of her whiteness and the predominant assumption in local spaces that white means power, competence, affluence, and access. Notwithstanding this subterfuge, Deola submits to Kate and Anna that LINKS should rather be focusing on microfinance self-sufficiency schemes instead of their usual momentary charity projects. While charity projects will mostly enrich both LINKS and the local NGO beneficiaries in the process of addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable African women and children, microfinance projects will bypass so much of the humanitarian professional hierarchy, as well as create a humanitarian culture of independence. This approach does not impress them, because it deviates from their humanitarian approach in Africa, which is centered on charity. They decline, claiming that Deola does not have adequate field experience to understand fully the extent of the everyday suffering mothers and children on the African continent are confronted with, which requires immediate charity response. When Deola attempts to push her recommendation directly to the board, Kate blatantly tells her that she can make any recommendation she wants, but it is very unlikely that her recommendations will be taken seriously, especially because the board of directors were reluctant to "get involved with Nigerian NGOs in the first place" (217). Deola by virtue of her 'outsider-within' status on the other hand is not surprised by this answer: "This is how charity works. No one gives money to people they are on a par with, so someone has to be diminished in the process" (201).

This however does not stop Deola from being incensed, and she angrily asks why she is sent to Nigeria at all if her recommendations will not be taken seriously. Deola's introspection on their rejection of her strategy brings to the fore Barbara Heron's analysis on the significance of the racialized constructions of space to the relational identity of whiteness (2007). That whiteness is powerfully upheld by the discursive representation of non-white people as inferior, and "the collapse or threatened breakdown of such boundaries has parlous implications" for white identity (56) is a motivation for why white humanitarianism will not be committed to schemes like microfinance, which will clearly create a model of self-sufficiency and optimum liberation in Africa. More so, the outright dismissal of her alternative sustainable approach to LINKS humanitarian intervention in Nigeria confirms Deola's suspicion that she is only a diversity hire and will not be taken seriously. Thinking back to how she got

the job with LINKS, she recollects the feeling of hypervisibility, the conscious-ness that she would stand a better chance of getting the job as long as "she pre-sented herself as an African in need" (Adichie 240). Her rhetorical question be-fore her resignation, "What was the point of working for an organisation that hired Africans like herself, who, in the process of being refined, could no longer think for themselves" (240) illuminates the anti-Africanness upon which the white humanitarian industry is established, the sinister motivation of control over postcolonial Africa's development, and the condition of non-recognition under which African aid experts are required to work within this professed al-truistic industry.

To end this chapter, I return to my argument that contemporary organiz-ing structures of internationalism as controlled by Western hegemony work hand in hand to inflict violence on women of African descent and restrict their access to any empowering subjectivity. To this end, the four novels, narrat-ing the disempowering struggles of women of African descent from various class categories, serve as exemplary model for the intersectional oppression Black women face within their communities and in the global order. While it is pertinent to note that there is no singular lived experience, and that the lived experiences of the characters certainly differ in relation to the intersection of class, there is nevertheless that vantage point of belonging to a racial-gendered marginal group and to the persistent dehumanization of an entire continent that cannot and must not be dismissed. It is this relationship between Black women's struggles and continuities of colonialism, white supremacy, capital-ism, and patriarchy that the novels powerfully explore.

Conclusion

As I step back and recreate the entire writing process of this book, from the moment I chose to freshly address the dire predicaments of Black women, to writing my first proposal draft with so much defeatism, finding suitable advisors, and defending the justifiability of my research topic to a funding organization, I remind myself of the anguish from which my intellectual labor outpours and appreciate the copious wealth of knowledge and intellectual confidence I have gained at the completion of this project. Hence, this conclusion chapter summarizes my analysis in relation to my research questions and reflects on the significance of combining self-reflexivity and critical work.

My research aimed to interrogate the interconnecting nature of Black women's oppression in the contemporary works of African diasporic women. The implication of the materiality encapsulated within this feminist research investigation is that Black women's disenfranchisement is not fundamentally influenced by gender and cannot be linked to the singular system of patriarchy, as one could facilely conclude when working with contemporary national literatures produced within postcolonial borders. If gender is not the centralizing and primary element of Black women's oppression, what does this mean for both local and global feminist liberational strategies, theorizations and recommendations, and feminist imaginations of liberation from systems of domination? This spurred my examination of the myriads of critical reflective works that are committed to the work of deconstructing Black women's disenfranchisement and oppression under a global sand transnational ystem of domination.

My six selected novels, *The Book of Nots, Homegoing, Americanah, On Black Sisters' Street, A Bit of Difference* and *We Need New Names,* depict gendered lived reality and shared experiences that transcend internal systems of power and organizing. The sociopolitical realities depicted in the novels, which the characters navigate daily, serve as counter-narratives to the dominant Western feminist

focus on androcentric politics—a focus that has long influenced and shaped global feminist advocacy. The novels' narrative and spatial frames, encompassing the African continent and diaspora, and transnational Black female characters, are thoughtful about deconstructing these phenomena and spotlighting the social mechanisms that engender the disenfranchisement of women of African descent. In embracing the critical reflection of Patricia Hill Collins on the delimitation of Black feminist thoughts, I have demonstrated in my analysis that the novels' thematic preoccupations allow for an interrogation of the lived experiences of Black women vis-a-vis those of other groups, irrespective of the African diasporic locations and African countries in which the narrations take place. Hence, my classification of them as Black feminist literatures.

Premising my investigation on the hypothesis that the perceived gendered struggle of women of African descent is multilayered and is linked to interconnected systems of power does not end at this obvious hypothesis with abundant literature reviews. While copious research in cultural and literary studies produced in the African American and Black-Europe intellectual spaces have outlined an intersection between the system of coloniality and patriarchy, or colonial-driven gendered arrangement, I argued that the systems of power are for the most part addressed as separate in much of the literary analysis produced from the African continent. With independence gained and the departure of white colonizers from the majority of the African countries, the catastrophic impact of colonialism is for the most part considered a foregone history. As a postcolonial scholar born and raised in Nigeria, this I argued is far from the case, and to have this perspective is to be oblivious to the ideological aspect and remnant of power and how it forms our consciousness. Thus, my close reading of these six novels written by female writers with African and Black diasporic identities embraced a range of multidisciplinary theories, not limited to Black feminist theories, to show that the depth of the oppression faced by Black women is submerged within the indigenous "epistemicide" and institutional vandalism brought about by colonial domination (Oyěwùmí 2016, 4).

To address this gap, my theoretical framework introduced transnational canonical works that are classified as Black feminist thoughts. The relevance of this framework for my study is axiomatic going by the book's title and research justification. The distinctiveness of this framework lies in its commitment to amplify Black women's intellectual contributions and center the many-faceted and integrated forms of oppression Black women face. Under this framework, concepts like intersectionality and misogynoir were introduced and a few

pages dedicated to their examinations. This framework was helpful to discern the distinctive forms of oppression experienced by African female characters in my selected novels, and how these characters' gendered experiences are even more so, made calamitous by their overlapping subordinating identities.

As stated in my introductory chapter, one of the significances of my research was my beeline to psychoanalysis. Under this theoretical framework, I engaged with American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler, on the psychoanalytic dimension that systemic power assumes the form of, in such a way that we become the effect of the systemic power that exerts dominance over us. This psychoanalytic framework was helpful for my interrogation of the Black female characters' struggles between their subjugated consciousness and agency. While copious amounts of sociological theory, as well as literary analysis have been produced on the materiality of structural power on the quality of marginalized peoples' lives, only a few have engaged with the psychic character of Black women's biography of disenfranchisement. Arguing that the consciousness Black women possess is the effect of the social power imposed upon us from outside begs the question if there is the possibility for resistance in this continuous cycle. Using psychoanalytic theory to read the novels facilitated the revelation of another layer of truth about the Black female characters' disenfranchisement and showed the painful vacillation between their consciousness, which is subjugated under the weight of colonial gendered-racism, and what could have been their own prereflexive agency. Even when it appears that no social power is stirringly acting upon some of the portrayed Black female characters, we see a few characters whose access to agency is sabotaged by their unconscious attachment to their orthodox subjection. Some other characters on the other hand at one point of their lives, come to a realization of the ways in which the very sophisticated colonial system of power shapes their consciousness and influences their evolving relationship with their ontology, as well as imagination of their obligation to the world. Between one set of characters whose navigation of social spaces show a fabricated quality to their consciousness and however do not show any form of resistance, and another set of characters that recognize their own lack of intrinsic agency, there is nevertheless a shared experience of endemic struggling under the crushing weight of the coloniality of a global system that is anti-Black, as it is at odds with the ontology and humanity of Black girls and women.

While the systems of domination that Black girls and women have to contend with everyday are immediately evident in all of the novels, I went further by embarking on an introspective journey with the characters to witness and

unfold how they progressively become the effects of the power operating in the social spaces they exist within. Both external and internal conflicts that the characters are embroiled within in the novels are represented as products of a larger anti-Black transnational discourse. As novels that are centered around representing the experiences of African girls and women, the consciousness of the characters demonstrates the aftereffects of colonial gendered racism on self-definition and valuation. The struggles of the characters to claim some form of entitlement to their prereflexive subjectivity is very profound in the novels. They continue to encounter disruption in one way or the other until they are left fragmented and depleted. Insubordination and resistance are met with punishments, and the characters eventually understand the futility of opposing the social and ideological operation of colonial power.

Tambu in *The Book of Not* is ravaged by colonial imported white supremacist and patriarchal education in colonial Rhodesia until she is reduced to nothing and suffers fragmentation in her identity, followed by complete compliance. Maame and generations of women descended from her in *Homegoing* suffer various forms of anti-Black gender violence of British slavery and colonialism. Gendered forms of neocolonial political, economic, socio-cultural, and economic instabilities in their various home countries inundate Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce's survival quests in *On Black Sisters' Street*. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu, the female protagonist is perceived as a recalcitrant girl-child for her attempts to resist colonial religious gendered teachings and suffers her fair share of racist-gendered subjection when she migrates to the US, until she wakes up one day, and cannot recognize who she has become. Witnessing Black female characters' attempts to rise many times over and claim some form of individualized agency over their subjectivities is inspiring, but on the other side of inspiring is the distress of witnessing how colonial epistemology causes disruption to indigenous social arrangements within which the characters' ontology is intelligibly fabricated.

The unfolding disruption to the characters' prereflexive subjectivity led to an analysis of the trans-generational traumatized condition of women of African descent. I drew heavily from the concept of intergenerational trauma to interrogate how Black female characters in *Homegoing, The Book of Not, We Need New Names, A Bit of Difference, On Black Sisters' Street and Americanah* embody trans-generational interactive dynamics that point to an unresolved legacy of their racial-gendered subjecthood. I showed that colonial patriarchal domination has caused severe deformation to Black women's individualities, as well as interpersonal relational dynamic. Socializing behaviors like stoicism,

aloofness and dissociation are a few discernible patterns that Black female characters in the texts display towards one another in both private and public social spaces, and I argued that these behaviors are embodied as reactive tools to the complexity of their powerlessness in their quest for surviving existence on the margin of global Eurocentric domination. Through an analysis of Black female characters' relationships with one another in the six novels, I spotlighted the aloofness, lack of sympathy, and grace the characters have for one another's hardship and survival strategies, and examined these as systemic traumatized conditions that can be traced to the constellation of power relations that operate conjointly to deny them agency and any kind of humane treatment. Placed in everyday situation where they have to witness themselves and one another as proof of their collective powerlessness, the characters' consciousness transmutate into a state of dissociation and mild to severe catatonia in order to survive their day-to-day disempowered reality.

Examining the manifestations (external and internal) of the Black female characters' disempowered reality compelled me to acknowledge the dangers of working with identity discourses, one of which is carelessly depicting Black female characters as a homogeneous oppressed group, and also manifesting a ubiquitous version of inequality and marginalization suffered by them. Drawing heavily from intersectional theory, I extended my analysis of Black female characters' lived reality within the overarching phenomenon of colonial-powered systems to examine how other identifiable social categories intersect with the characters' racialized-gendered social biography, to shape their agential capacities in the final sub-topic of my chapter one. If according to my introduction, it is not far-fetched to hypothesize that colonial power system constitutes a dominant aspect of African women's experience of gender given that the system and its continuities is at the heart of the continent's exploitation and Europe's project of modernity. Then for clarity's sake, due diligence must be done to the analysis of the social arrangements within which representations of Black women's agential capacities unfold in the novels.

While an insight into the layers of (in)equality that structures the relative agencies of African women meant using Black-centered feminist paradigms like intersectionality to look into the other aspects of the characters' social identities like sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and class, I was conscious of the underlying fact of the colonial subjugation of Africa that according to copious Afro-centric scholars have caused severe alteration to Africa's social fabric. Africa and African people's unique history with Euro-American engineered viciousness meant not only examining African women's intersecting social

identities in the novels. Equally important was mapping the historical sites with reference to the social, cultural, and institutional arrangements that are invoked in the novels. This I painstakingly did via a linear temporal approach. Five out of my six selected novels were analyzed. They were *The Book of Not, Homegoing, A Bit of Difference, On Black Sisters' Street* and *Americanah*. I sectioned my analysis of the novels into a before, during and after colonial contact with the hope that coherence is provided to an otherwise complex socio-historical biography. In the *Book of Not* and *Homegoing*, my intersectional analysis of the African female characters agencies was carried out within the pre-colonial to colonial temporal frame of the novels. In *A Bit of Difference, On Black Sisters' Street and Americanah*, I grounded my analysis within the independence to postcolonial temporal frame.

The social arrangements, characters' identities, and the structural and affective impact of these identities—whether independently or collectively—shape the characters' lived experiences and drive the plots of all the novels. As the plots progress in the narration of the social arrangements, the gender system is likewise revealed, bringing to the surface the organizing principles that abound within the fictionalized pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial social spaces. In the first two novels, which abundantly fictionalize pre-colonial and colonial events, the community and personal social space is fictionalized as an empowered site for African girls and women. The popularized misconception that African women experience both African-derived and colonial-derived patriarchal oppression is countered with the representation of dialogical gender relational systems that is gleaned in the fictionalized pre-colonial socializations. The gender character of the fictionalized pre-colonial social arrangements does not solely organize around male domination and female subjugation, bringing to the fore a wider articulation of gender in the context of which women's agential capacities can be identified. Dangarembga and Gyasi's African female characters embody myriad forms of empowerment, agency and enfranchisement in social life and collective authority. The female body is treated with respect and celebration. Women occupy various positions of power, and their engagements highly regarded, both privately and publicly. Their inferiorization and demonization in corporeal aspect and complete disenfranchisement in social, economic, religious, and political aspects only begin to take shape following colonial socialization and develops into sweeping patriarchal system on the continent and colonial gendered interpellation in the Black Diasporas as fictionalized in the postcolonial temporal frames of Atta, Unigwe, and Adichie's novels. For

the African woman, colonial gender system interfused with colonial power means colonial gendered logic was introduced into the African colonies, at the same time that African women were racialized and excluded from the nobility and colonial patriarchal-derived welfare that was reserved for white European women, bringing to a poignant realization that any African-centered feminist endeavor that overlooks colonial-gender enmeshment is fundamentally deficient.

After successfully mobilizing history and social positionality and establishing the crucial context to Black women's struggle, I engaged with the constructions of difference in Black female characters' experience of gender. Using the concept of misogynoir, which explains how our Blackness and womanhood is weaponized to dehumanize us, I demonstrated through an analysis of Adichie's *Americanah*, Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, that Black female characters' intimacy with their corporeality is submerged in colonial racialized consciousness. First, I explored the characters relationship with their hair. As works of fiction written by African female writers with diasporic identities, one finds that characters that straddle transnational social spaces and possess transnational Euro-American and African identities are inexhaustibly represented, providing the frame to deconstruct phenomena that is inclined to misconception outside of transnational frameworks. Yet again, incorporation of transnational mobility of the Black female characters allowed for my analysis of how Black women's embodied corporeality defies simple patriarchal social system. The characters' struggle with their hair presentation is contemplated anew, and the power structures that border their subjectivities is realized. Characters' anxiety about their hair texture is on a constant high, and their concept of beauty defined through colonial lens both on the African continent and in the African diaspora. The protagonist in *Americanah*, who is represented as belonging to the upper professional class in the US, must take multiple train rides to get to a salon where she is able to get suitable care for her hair. The salon is also described as located in the squalid abandoned part of the city, and the farther she goes the less white people she meets, signifying a supereminent connection between race, gender, and class. Black female characters in the novels considerably suffer from internalized anti-Blackness and only consider themselves sufficiently beautiful when their hair texture is altered with harmful texturizing chemicals. In the case that they feel confident enough to wear their Black textured hair, they are exposed to anti-Black commentaries and exoticized and subjected to Eurocentric patriarchal policies that border

feminine presentation in professional spaces, which they must navigate. With feminist works spotlighting the intersection between patriarchy and beauty standards commonly applied to female bodies, how Black women's experience departs from this singular social structure could yet again be eclipsed. For Black women, it is not only patriarchy that demands conformity. Colonial patriarchy, which defines for the most part gender system, is what we must contend with in our everyday lives.

Another construct of difference I explored was the domestic kitchen and how the conception of female subjugation that emerged from this social space could not provide adequate coverage for Black women's oppression. I demonstrated through an analysis of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* and Gyasi's *Homegoing* that the gendered character of the domestic kitchen was one of collaboration than subjugation prior to colonial domination. I also demonstrated through an analysis of Adichie's *Americanah* and Atta's *A Bit of Difference* that in the system of postcolonial Euro-centered capitalist modernity, the power structures that linger in the domestic kitchen space of the characters' familial homes is much more complex than the monological narrative of female subjugation under patriarchy. Through an analysis of the tribal intersubjective lives, *The Book of Not* and *Homegoing* show that the boundary between the public and private is blurred in precolonial societies and the domestic kitchen space, which carries private connotation in colonial modernity is publicly situated in precolonial societies. The social interactions that unfold in this publicly situated cooking space show collaboration between the men and women, and cooking in itself is regarded as an essential and respected aspect of human life. With colonial patriarchal domination disrupting the social order and immersing African male characters into colonial patriarchal consciousness, the novels show that the domestic kitchen also experiences transformation with the women losing the rights and practices of collaboration that once existed in this sacred social space. Under colonial gender system, African female characters must serve in the domestic kitchen at the pleasure of their European mistress and observe the disenfranchised practices of the colonial gender system. The impulse to cater to their Black men and children who are dominated by colonial power, at the same time that they are assimilated into colonial patriarchal roles is also represented in the novels. For the African female characters depicted in these novels, the domestic kitchen becomes an affectively paradoxical site of subjugation and safety, and of exploitation and recreation. These novels' representation of African people and especially African women's entanglement with European colonialism and imperial expansion convey an

awareness of the intersectionality of Black women's oppression, and in line with my research objective, enables the reader to ask crucial questions in regard to Black women's oppression. Questions like who is perpetuating the subjugation because the appearance of subjugation is nuancedly so?

Having acknowledged the entanglement of Black women's lived reality with systems introduced by Western colonialism and the distinctive racial-gender subjectivities and inter-subjectivities that have emerged from this point of entanglement, I examined the sophisticated twentieth-century enfranchised systems that have emerged from Euro-American colonization to define all of modernity and Black women's sense of being and belonging. To explore this sufficiently, I placed together three frameworks of analysis (immigration, citizenship, and humanitarian crisis) that bears witness to copious political and academic contestations, solidarities, and knowledge production. How women of African descent, who have been targets of brutal Eurocentric domination and dehumanization, experience this colonial-instituted modern system that has championed the liberation of some people as it has crystallized the exploitation of others was the focus of this preoccupation. By examining Black female characters across social and economic classes in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Atta's *A Bit of Difference* and Adichie's *Americanah*, I show that the sophisticated system of legitimized authority, in which all of existential domain and human's constitutionality is articulated around, is only but an instrumentality of humiliation, delegitimization, and lethality for women systematized along colonial racial lines. Examining the characters' maneuvers of the modern system means spotlighting systems that have established themselves, at the same time that they have gained their validity from Eurocentric colonial power. One of such systems is the workings of global capitalism that has re-configured itself from colonial and imperialist activities.

Unigwe and Bulawayo both depict African female characters from lower impoverished class and what they must do to survive the overlapping modern systems they find themselves. In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, through an analysis of the characterization of four African migrant sex workers, three of which willingly agree to be trafficked to Europe to sell sex in return for upward mobility, the novel shows that gendered agency through sex work is an illusion the female characters have no access to because of their racialized identities. Even though they work within the modern system that ensures the legitimacy of gendered sex work, they are subject to global colonial capitalist categorizations that make them vulnerable to systematic violences and ruthlessness,

leading to the femicide of one of them. In *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference*, the African female protagonists from middle and upper class respectively face their own share of racialized-gendered ordeals. The system of anti-Blackness, embedded within the modern gendered order, negatively impacts their sense of belonging and participation so much so that to have a chance at success, they must alter a chunk of their subjectivity to survive their migration project. After years of living and even obtaining citizenships of their respective host countries, they both decide to return home due to copious reasons that range from discontentment to disenfranchisement. The female protagonist, Darling in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, who like Unigwe's characters is lower class, suffers violent conditions that has its roots in global colonial capitalism and patriarchy, and finds no respite upon her hopeful migration to the United States. The politics of who belongs, who is legal, who is allowed to participate, and who is afforded protection and opportunities, is marked by power dynamics rooted in colonial patriarchy. The climax of her violent domination is her inability to return to her home country despite her desperate longing, due to her status of non-constitutionality in the US. White humanitarianism also holds a pivotal presence in the texts demonstrating another overlapping modern system, which is articulated through Eurocentric colonial power. Africa and by extension African women occupy a position of inferiority and powerlessness in the imagination of Euro-American white female characters. This perception is reflected in the inter-subjective polemic assertions and colloquialisms alluded to whenever there is contact between either group, generating an abundance of tension, hostility, and disconcertion.

I must say that my analysis is by no means comprehensive in light of the novels I used for my analysis. I have had to focus on novels produced by African women diasporic writers who write in English and from the Anglophone areas of Africa. This is due to language limitation. Even more regrettable is the fact that Nigeria and Zimbabwe receive the greatest attention due to their dominant presence in the contemporary literary sphere. However, my dissertation can be considered a start to analyzing the plights of African women through multifunctional theories and counter discourses produced by Black women theorists globally. I also hope that in future research endeavors, I am able to extend my analysis to other areas of Africa where English is not the predominant language of literary writing. Additionally, in deploying literary texts to engage with the prevalent context of Black women's manifestation of oppression, I have embarked on what could be classified as a sociological analysis, which could leave my work open to potential literary criticism. The reading

of a literary text, as has been fundamentally established across the dynamic field of literary theory, must be divested of any endeavor that attempts to bestow on it objective interpretation. One way I avoided this conundrum was by foregrounding the form of the novels in relation to their narrative strategies and affective devices, while also integrating these strategies with thematic preoccupations to create a cohesive and meaningful whole. Nevertheless, one can discern in the reading of my work that I am very much invested in the lived reality of Black women, particularly with my introduction that followed a self-reflexive approach. Correspondingly, my hypothesis that Black women writers continue in their renowned creative journey of problematizing the experience of Otherness and kaleidoscope of oppression in their contemporary literary works, together with my deployment of Patricia Hill Collin's theoretical framework on what works can be classified as Black feminist thoughts cast an imposing shadow over much of my dissertation. One could argue that this hypothetical statement is rife with the implications that all Black women writers in the diaspora produce Black feminist works that challenge the established order, or that they are stripped of their individualities and their texts stripped of textual freedom. To address this grave misunderstanding of my work, I incorporated the literary interviews my selected writers have granted over the course of their writing lives. First, I mapped out the evolution of the literary interview in literary tradition, and the tension that has followed its deployment in literary criticism. To underscore the necessity of reading and incorporating the literary interview into my literary analysis of Black women's lived reality, I engaged with works that establish a synchronicity between African women's socio-historical consciousness as members of marginalized groups and discursive space of Black colonial patriarchy in which their writings occur and their textual products, and how the former furnishes the latter with discursive meanings to be discerned by the reader.

I also positioned the six fictional texts within a literary discourse community dedicated to narrating the experiences of Black women. Another less apparent, but equally important way is by analyzing at least four, sometimes all of my selected novels for each examined subtopic. This approach enabled the revelation of various dialogic tensions with dominant structures and helped identify the key elements that connect the authors. i.e., using their writings to name and identify the systems of power that interfere with Black women's self-actualization as well as challenge the taken-for-granted status-quo. All these to show that the experience of writing by these selected authors is a dialogical experience entered into by them and their novels an outlet for encounters of

subjugation within the status quo. The question to be answered becomes: To what extent can my hypothetical statement be justified without venturing into problematic territory? By demonstrating how viscerally aware these texts are of Black women's multifaceted struggle in the global world order, I say that I have achieved said objective.

Bibliography

Adejare, Oluwadare Hammed. "A Life Elsewhere?: Afropolitanist Reading of Race Struggle, Identity and Home in Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah." *Africana Studies Student Research Conference*, 2018, pp. 1–15. *BGSU*, https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/africana_studies_conf/2018/004/1.

Adichie, Chimamanda, Ngozi. "A Nigerian-'Americanah' Novel about Love, Race and Hair." Interview Transcript by NPR Staff. *NPR*. 11 May 2013. https://www.npr.org/2013/05/11/181685674/a-nigerian-americanah-novel-about-love-race-and-hair?t=1602149729150.

—. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Continental Divides." Interview by Joseph Klarl. *Interview Magazine*. 13 May 2013. https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-americanah.

—. "Life across Borders: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Talks about 'Americanah'." Interview Excerpt by John Williams. *The New York Times*. 6 June 2013. https://www.artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/06/life-across-borders-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-talks-about-americanah/.

—. *Americanah*. Anchor Books, 2014.

—. "'Americanah' Author Explains 'Learning' to be Black in the US." Interview Transcript. *NPR*. 7 March 2014. https://www.npr.org/2014/03/07/286903648/americanah-author-explains-learning-to-be-black-in-the-u-s?t=1601906800375.

—. "The Rumpus Interview with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie". Interview by The Rumpus. The Rumpus. 17 June 2014. https://www.therumpus.net/2014/06/the-rumpus-interview-with-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/.

—. "The Intolerant Left." Edited Transcript of the Conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Jeffrey Goldberg. *The Atlantic*. 14 Nov. 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/11/the-intolerant-left/545783/.

Alexander, Simone, A. "M/othering the Nation: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Trope in Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory." *African American Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2011, pp. 373–390. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23316192.

Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands. Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Zed Books, 1987

Ang, Ien. "'I'm a Feminist but... "Other" Women and Postcolonial Feminism'." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*, edited by Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, University Press, 2003, pp. 190–205.

—. "New Terms of Resistance: A Response to Zenzele Isoke." *Souls*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2013, pp. 341–343, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262938845_New_Terms_of_Resistance_A_Response_to_Zenzele_Isoke.

Allen, Graham. Intertextuality. Routledge, 2011.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971.

"APA Dictionary of Psychology." *American Psychological Association*, 2020, https://www.dictionary.apa.org/intergenerational-trauma.

Ashcroft, Bill et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2000.

Atta, Sefi. "An Interview with Sefi Atta." Interview by Elena Rodriguez Murphy. Indiana Uni Press, vol. 43, no. 3, 2012, pp. 106–114. *Project Muse*. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/483368/pdf.

—. "Sefi Atta: An Interview with a Leading Nigerian Author." Interview by The African Book Review. *The African Book Review*. 22 Sept 2013. https://www.theafricanbookreview.com/2013/09/22/sefi-atta-an-interview-with-a-leading-nigerian-author/.

—. *A Bit of Difference*. HarperCollins Publication, 2013.

—. "Sefi Atta Talks History, Her New Novel and Writing about Lagos Elite." Interview by Toni Kan. *Brittle Paper*. 14 Jan 2019. https://www.brittlepaper.com/2019/01/chronicle-society-untold-sefi-atta-talks/.

Moya, Bailey. "New Terms of Resistance: A Response to Zenzele Isoke, *Souls*, vol. 15 (4) 2013, pp. 341–343. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2014.884451.

Bailey, Moya and Trudy. "On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, and Plagiarism." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol.18, no. 4, 2018, pp. 762–768, *Taylor &Francis Online*, https://10.1080/14680777.2018.1447395.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1982.

Baldwin, Andrew and Erickson, Bruce. "Introduction: Whiteness, Coloniality, and the Anthropocene." *Society and Space*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–11. *SAGE*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820904485.

Bales, Kevin. *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. University of California Press, 2000.

Barbour, John, D. "Edward Said and The Space of Exile." *Literature and Theology*, vol. 21, no. 3, Sept 2007, pp. 293–301, Oxford Academic, https://doi:10.1093/litthe/frm026.

Bascom, William. *The Yoruba of SouthWestern Nigeria*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969.

Bastida-Rodriguez, Patricia. "The Invisible Flaneuse: European Cities and the Africa Sex Worker in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2014, pp. 203–214. *SAGE*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989414529119.

Bawer, Bruce. "The Literary Life: Talk Show: The Rise of the Literary Interview." *The American Scholar*, vol. 57, no. 3, 1988, pp. 421–429. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41211552.

Bear, Laura et al. "Gens: A Feminist Manifesto for the Study of Capitalism." *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights*. 30 March 2015, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/gens-a-feminist-manifesto-for-the-study-of-capitalism.

Benton, Adia. "African Expatriates and Race in the Anthropology of Humanitarianism." *Critical African Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2016, pp. 266–277. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2016.1244956.

Berrian, Brenda F. "An Update: Bibliography of Twelve African women Writers." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1988, pp. 206–231. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819448.

Bian, Junru. "The racialization of Expertise and Professional Non-Equivalence in the Humanitarian Workplace." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2022, pp. 1–14. *Springer*, https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00112-9.

Boittin, Anne Jennifer. "Are You Trying to Play a white Woman? La Mere Patrie and the Female Body in French West Africa." *Signs*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2015, pp. 841–864. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/680471.

Boonzaier, Floretta A. "Spectacularizing Narratives on Femicide in South Africa: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis." *Femicide Special Section*, vol. 00, no. 0, 2022, pp. 1–19. *SAGE*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392122109757.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Sani Abacha". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 16 Sep. 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sani-Abacha.

Brown, Barkley Elsa. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke." *The Black Studies Reader*, edited by Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley and Claudine Michel, Routledge, 2004, pp. 47–64.

Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Vintage, 2014.

—. "Interview with NoViolet Bulawayo" Interview by Christian Hartselle. *Manuscripts*, vol. 80, Iss. 1, 2015. https://www.digitalcommons.butler.edu/manuscripts/vol80/iss1/53.

—. "Writing about Women at the Margins: An Interview with NoViolet Bulawayo." Interview by Alice Driver. *Vela*, https://www.velamag.com/writing-about-women-at-the-margins-an-interview-with-noviolet-bulawayo.

Busia, Abena. "In Search of Chains Without Iron: On Sisterhood, History and the Politics of Location." *African Women & Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, edited by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Africa World Press, Inc., 2003, pp. 257–268.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge, 1993

—. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford University Press, 1997.

—. "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time." *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 59, iss. 1, 2008, pp. 1–23. *Wiley Online Library*, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00176.x.

—. "I am a Sexist." Received by George Yancy, 10 July 2019. Email Interview.

Caputi, Jane and Russell, Diana, E.H. "Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against women." *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford and Diana E.H Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 12–20.

Carbado, Devon W. "Colorblind Intersectionality." *Signs*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 811–845. *JSTOR*, http://jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669666.

Carbado, Devon W et al. "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2013, pp. 303–312. *National Institute of Health*, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000349.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. "When Echoes Return." *Transition*, Indiana University Press, no. 104, 2011, pp. 76–92. *JSTOR*, http://jstor.org/stable/10.2979/transition.2011.-.104.76.

—. "The Newly Black Americans: African Immigrants and Black." *Transition*, iss. 113, 2014, pp. 52–71. *Project Muse*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/541463.

—. "Blackness and Becoming: Édouard Glissant's Retour." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2018, pp. 43–45. *Taylor & Francis*, https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2018.1514926.

—. "Fractured Affinities in the African Diaspora: An Interview with Louis Chude-Sokei." Interview by Erik Gleibermann. Transition, Indiana University Press, iss. 131, 2021, pp. 96–113. *Project Muse*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/842496.

—. "On the Many Meanings of Black Diaspora." *Literary Hub*, 3 Feb. 2021, https://www.lithub.com/on-the-many-meanings-of-black-diaspora/.

Cobo-Pinero, Rocio, M. "From Africa to America." *Atlantis*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2018, pp. 11–26. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26566960.

Collins, Patricia, H. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*." *Social Problems*, vol 33, no. 1, 1986, pp. s14-s32. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/800672.

—. "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1996, pp. 9–17. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41068619.

—. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Policies of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.

—. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism*. Routledge, 2004.

Collins, Patricia, H and Bilge Sirma. *Intersectionality*. Polity Press, 2016.

Concilio, Carmen. "We Need New Names by NoViolet Bulawayo: Paradigms of Migration: The Flight and the Fall." *Le Simplegadi*, vol. Xvi, no. 18, Nov. 2018, pp. 34–51. *ResearchGate*, https://doi.org/10.17456/SIMPLE-94.

Contreras-Morales, Leslie. "Our Bodies are not your Toy." *Gender Theory*, 12 May 2017, https://medium.com/gender-theory/our-bodies-are-not-your-toy-c714f26358f9.

Corradi, Consuelo et al. "Theories of Femicide and Their Significance for Social Research." *Current Sociology*, vol. 64, no. 7, Nov. 2016, pp. 975–995, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115622256.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, Iss. 1, 1989, pp. 138–167, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

—. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against women of Color." *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller & Kendall Thomas, The New Press, 1995, pp. 357–383.

Crenshaw Kimberlé et al. Introduction. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Crenshaw, et al, The New Press, 1995, pp. xiii-xxxii.

Danewid, Ida. "White Innocence in the Black Mediterranean: Hospitality and the Erasure of History." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 7, 2017, pp. 1674–1689. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1 331123.

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga." Interview by Rosemary Marangoly George & Helen Scott. *Duke University Press*, Vol. 26, no. 3, 1993, pp. 309–319. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1345839.

—. *The Book of Not*. Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd, 2006.

—. "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga." Interview by Robtel Neajai Pailey. *Pambazuka News*, 05 Oct 2006, https://www.pambazuka.org/arts/intervie w-tsitsi-dangarembga.

—. "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga." Interview by Caroline Rooney. *Routledge*, Vol. 22, no. 2, 2007, pp. 57–62. *Wasafiri*, https://doi.org/10.108 0/02690050701336949.

—. "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga." Interview by Madeleine Thien. *Brick*, 2013, https://www.brickmag.com/an-interview-with-tsitsi-dangar embga/.

—. "A Crisis of Personhood: Tsitsi Dangarembga." Interview by Bhakti Shringarpure. *Bomb*, 27, Sept 2019, https://www.bombmagazine.org/arti cles/tsitsi-dangarembga.

Darboe, Foday. "Africans and African Americans: Conflicts, Stereotypes and Grudges." *Challenging Paradigms: New Frontiers in Graduate Research*, vol. 2, iss. 1, article 19, pp. 1–35. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*, https://doi.or g/1015760/ mcnair.2006.48.

Dash, Paul. "Black Hair Culture, Politics and Change." *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol.10, no. 1, 2006, pp. 27–37. *Taylor & Francis Online*, htt ps://doi.org/10.1080/13603110500173183.

Davidson, Julia, O'Connell. "Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?." *Feminist Review*, no. 83, 2006, pp. 4–22. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/387438 0.

Davis, Noela. "Subjected Subjects? On Judith Butler's Paradox of Interpellation." *Hypatia*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, pp. 881–897. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23352300.

Dayo, Bernard. "The Ongoing Rift between African Immigrants and African Americans." *OkayAfrica*, 10 June 2021, https://www.okayafrica.com/tensions-between-African Americans-and-african-immigrants/.

Diallo, Midtvage Oda-Kange. "At the Margins of Institutional Whiteness: Black Women in Danish Academia." *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe*, edited by Akwugo Emejulu & Francesca Sobande, Pluto Press, 2019, pp. 219–228.

Domingo, Chris. "What the White Man Won't Tell Us: Report from the Berkeley Clearinghouse on Femicide." *The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 194–202.

Emecheta, Buchi. "Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World." Edited by Feroza Jussawalla & Reed Way Dasenbrock, University Press of Mississippi, 1992, pp. 83–99.

Emejulu, Akwugo and Sobande, Francesca, editor. *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe*. Pluto, 2019.

Essed, Philomena. "Everyday Racism: A New Approach to the Study of Racism." *Race Critical Theories*, edited by Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 176–191.

—. "Defining Black Feminist Thought." *Race Critical Theories*, edited by Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell Pub, 2002, pp. 152–171.

Fadipe, N.A. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan UP, 1970.

Falola Toyin and Genova Ann. *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*. Boydell & Brewer, University of Rochester Press, 2006.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 2004.

—. *Black Skin White Masks*. Pluto Press, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Random House, 1979.

Genette, Gérard. Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation. Cambridge Uni Press, 1997. *EBSCOhost*, https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=31dc75c5-34f5-4204-8d69-0e26cde0c1fc%40redis&ppid=pp_6&vid=0&format=EB.

Gibeault, Michelle Jude. *The Anonymous Web in Adichie's Americanah*. 2019. University of Arkansas, Master's thesis. https://www.scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/3470.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

Ginzburg, Ralph. *100 Years of Lynchings*. New York, Lancer Books, 1962.

Grant, Jaime, M. "Who's Killing Us?." *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 145–160.

Gregoire Nicole and Ntambwe Modi. "Afro women's Activism in Belgium: Questioning Diversity and Solidarity." *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe*, Pluto Press, 2019, pp. 63–76.

Guarracino, Serena. "Writing «so raw and true»: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*." *Between*, vol. IV, no. 8, 2014, pp. 1–27. *ResearchGate*, https://doi.org/10.13125/2039-6597/1320.

Gyasi, Yaa. *Homegoing*. Penguin, 2016.

—. "The Rumpus Interview with Yaa Gyasi." Interview by The Rumpus. *The Rumpus*. 29 July 2016. https://www.therumpus.net/2016/07/the-rumpus-interview-with-yaa-gyasi/.

—. "More at Stake Here than Beauty: An Interview with Yaa Gyasi." Interview by Leah Mirakhor. *Larb*. 24 Sept. 2016. https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/stake-beauty-interview-yaa-gyasi/.

—. "Yaa Gyasi: Taking a Long View." Interview by Guernica. *Guernica*. 16 Sept. 2016. https://www.guernicamag.com/taking-a-long-view/.

—. "Yaa Gyasi: Slavery is on People's Minds. It Affects Us Still." Interview by Kate Kellaway. *The Guardian*. 8 Jan. 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/08/yaa-gyasi-slavery-is-on-peoples-minds-it-affects-us-still-interview-homegoing-observer-new-review.

—. "ILB Interview: Yaa Gyasi." Interview Excerpt by Anton Dechand. *Exberliner*. 5 Sept 2018. https://www.exberliner.com/whats-on/international-literature-festival-blog-yaa-gyasi-interview/.

—. "Yaa Gyasi." Interview by Sofia Hericson. *Foyles*. n.d. https://www.foyles.co.uk/Author-Yaa-Gyasi.

Haggis, Jane. "Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender? Recent Women's Studies Approach to White Women and the History of British Colonialism." *Women's Studies in International Forum*, vol. 13, no. ½, 1990, pp. 105–115. *ResearchGate*, https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(90)9077-B.

—. "White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History." *Gender and Imperialism*, edited by Clare Midgley, Manchester Uni Press, 1998.

—. "White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*, edited by Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, University Press, 2003, pp. 165–188.

Hall, Stuart. "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance." *Race Critical Theories*, edited by Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 38–68.

Harris, Fredrick, C. "The Rise of Respectability Politics." *Dissent*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2014, pp. 33–37. *Project Muse*, https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2014.0010.

Harris, Paisley, Jane. "Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women's History and Black Feminism." *Journal of Women's History*, vol.15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 212–220. *Project Muse*, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0025.

Hegarty, Stephanie. "Ukraine Conflict: Nigeria Condemns Treatment of Africans." *BBC News*, BBC, 28 Feb. 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60555650.

Hernton, Calvin. "The Sexual Mountain and Black women Writers." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1984, pp. 139–145. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2904288.

Heron, Barbara. *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender, and the Helping Imperative*. Wilfrid Laurier Uni Press, 2007.

Hine, Clark, Darnielle, et al, editors. *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*. University of Illinois Press, 2009.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Pluto Press, 1982.

—. "Theory as Liberatory Practice." *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism*, vol. 4, iss. 1, article 2, 1991, pp. 1–12, https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol4/iss1/2.

—. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, pp. 21 39. Boston: South end Press, 1992. https://ryerson.ca/DE_courses/uploadedFiles/6052_Arts/CSOC202/Modules/Module_00/eating%20the%20other.pdf.

—. "bell hooks: Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness." In conversation with George Yancy. *The New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2015, https://www.opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks-buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness/#more-158658.

Hudson-Weems, *Clenora. Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. 5th ed., Routledge, 2020.

Ifekwunigwe, Jayne, O. "Recasting 'Black Venus' in the 'New' African Diaspora." *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, edited by Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 206–225, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822387596-012.

Jacobs, Sylvia, M. "Afro-American women Missionaries Confront the African Way of Life." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton Rushing, Howard University Press, 1987, 121–132.

James, Adeola, editor. *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. James Currey and Heinemann, 1990.

Johnson, Tabora, A and Bankhead, Teiahsha. "Hair it is: Examining the Experiences of Black Women with Natural Hair." *Cuny Academic Works*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2014.21010.

Kelsey, Adams. "How Black Sisterhood Saved Me." *Flare*, 2 June 2020, https://www.flare.com/identity/black-female-friendships/.

Kempadoo, Kamala. "The Modern-Day white (Wo)Man's Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 1, 2015, pp. 8–20, *Routledge*, https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1006120.

King, Vanessa and Niabaly, Dieynaba. "The Politics of Black Women's Hair." *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University*, vol. 13, no.4, 2013, pp. 1–19. *Cornerstone*, https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol13/iss1/4.

Kuumba, Bahati, M. "African Feminisms in Exile: Diasporan, Transnational and Transgressive." *Agenda*, vol. 17, no. 58, 2003, pp. 3–11. *ResearchGate*, https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2003.9674487.

Ladele, Omolola, A and Omotayo, Adesumbo E. "Migration and Identities in Chika Unigwe's Novels." *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2017, pp. 52–57. *CSCanada*, https://doi.org/10.3968/9437.

Landry, Ava. "Black Is Black Is Black?: African Immigrant Acculturation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing." *MELUS*, vol. 43, issue 4, 2018, pp. 127–147. *Oxford Academic*, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mly044.

Lawless, Elaine, J. "Women as Abject: Resisting Cultural and Religious Myths that Condone Violence against Women." *Western Folklore*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2003, pp. 237–269. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1500319.

Lewis, Reina. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*. Routledge, 1996.

Ligaga, Dina. "Ambiguous Agency in the Vulnerable Trafficked Body: Reading Sanusi's Eyo and Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street." *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2019, pp. 74–88. https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.56i1.6274.

Lloyd, David. "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?." *Intervention*, vol. 2, iss. 2, 2000, pp. 212–228. *Routledge*, https://doi.org/10.1080/136980100427324.

Loewenberg, Bert, J., and Ruth Bogin, editors. *Black women in Nineteenth-Century American Life*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

Lukate, Melissa, Johanna. "Blackness Disrupts my Germanness: On Embodiment and Questions of Identity and Belonging among Women of Colour in Germany." *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe*, edited by Akwugo Emejulu & Francesca Sobande, Pluto Press, 2019, pp. 116–128.

Mai, Nicola. "Too Much Suffering: Understanding the Interplay between Migration, Bounded Exploitation and Trafficking through Nigerian Sex Workers' Experiences." *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2016, pp. 1–13. *Socresonline*, https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.4158.

Maine, David. "'A Bit of Difference' Is a Low-Key Novel That Touches on Some Big Issues, Popmatters." *PopMatters*, 27 Jan. 2013, https://www.popmatters.com/167276-a-bit-of-difference-by-sefi-atta-2495785292.html.

Mangena, Oshadi. "Feminism (Singular), African Feminisms (Plural) and the African Diaspora." *Agenda: Empowering women for Gender Equity*, no. 58, 2003, pp. 98–100. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4548102.

Masschelein, Anneleen et al. "The Literary Interview: Toward a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre." *Poetics Today*, vol. 35, no. 1–2, 2014, pp. 1–49. *Dukeupress*, https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2648368.

Maynard, Robyn. "Black Sex Workers' Lives Matter: Appropriation of Black Suffering." *Truthouttruthout*, 19 Sept. 2015, https://truthout.org/articles/black-sex-workers-lives-matter-appropriation-of-black-suffering/.

McCoy, Shane, A. "The "Outsider Within": Counter-Narratives of the "New" African Diaspora in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Journal of the African Literature Association*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 279–294, https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2018.1424389.

Meah, Angela. "Reconceptualizing Power and Gendered Subjectivities in Domestic Cooking Spaces." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 38, no. 5, 2014, pp. 671–690. *SAGE*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132513501404.

Mills, Sara. "Gender and Colonial Space." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*, edited by Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, University Press, 2003, pp. 692–714.

Mohanty, Chandra, T. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*, edited by Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, University Press, 2003, pp. 49–71.

—. "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World women and the Politics of Feminism." *Race Critical Theories*, edited by Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 195–214.

Moyazb. "They Aren't Talking about Me…" *Png*, 5 Mar. 2011, https://www.crunk feministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/.

Nash, Jennifer, C. *Black Feminism Reimagined*. Duke University Press, 2019.

Ndaka, Mutunga Felix. "Rupturing the Genre: Un-Writing Silence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." Wagadu: *A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, vol. 18, 2017, pp. 101–123. *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342844542_Transnational_Women's_and_Gender_Studies.

Ngom, Mamadou Abdou Babou. "Migration and its Discontents: A Postcolonial Rendering of NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names." *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, vol 1, no. 2, 2020, pp. 10–19. *Global Talent Academy*, https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsII.v1i2.50.

No white Saviors. White Humanitarianism as a Form of White Control. *Instagram*, 23 Aug. 2021, https://www.instagram.com/P/CS7qv2qM06Z/?utm_medium=copy_link.

Okazawa-Rey, Robinson Tracy and Ward, Victoria Janie. "Black Women and the Politics of Skin Color and Hair." *Women & Therapy*, vol. 6, no. 1–2, 1987, pp. 89–102. *Taylor & Francis*, https://doi.org/10.1300/J015V06N01 07.

Okolo, Genevieve Ifeyinwa. "Unsettled Subjects: Sex Work in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." English Studies in Africa, vol. 62, no. 2, 2019, pp. 112–113. *Taylor & Francis*, *https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2019.1685251*.

Okome, Olufunke Mojubaolu. "What Women, Whose Developments? A Critical Aanalysis of Reformist Evangelism on African Women." *African Women & Feminism*, edited by Oyěwùmí Oyeronke, Africa World Press, Inc., 2003, pp. 67–98.

Oyěwùmí, Oyeronke. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

—. "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse." *African Women & Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, edited by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Africa World Press, Inc., 2003, pp. 25–43.

—. "Introduction: Feminism, Sisterhood, and Other Foreign Relations." *African Women & Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, edited by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, African World Press Inc., 2003, pp. 1–24.

—. "Colonizing Bodies and Minds." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 256–259.

—. *What Gender is Motherhood?: Changing Yoruba Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Pallister-Wilkins, Polly. "Saving the Souls of white Folk: Humanitarianism as white Supremacy." *Security Dialogue*, vol. 52(S), 2021, pp. 98–106., https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106211024419.

Peterson, Kirsten, Holst. "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, 2nd ed, Routledge, 1995, pp. 251–258.

Porter, James, E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1986, pp. 34–47. *JSTOR*, http://jstor.org/stable/466015.

Radford, Jill. Introduction. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 3–13.

Ray, Rashawn. "The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Shows Racism Has No Boundaries." *Brookings*, 3 Mar. 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2022/03/03/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-shows-racism-has-no-boundaries/.

Reed, Adolph, Jr. "Antiracism: A Neoliberal Alternative to a Left." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 42, issue 2, pp. 105–115. *Springer Netherlands*, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-017-9476-3.

Richey, Lisa, Ann, editor. *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations: Politics, Place and Power*. Routledge, 2016.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*. Random House, 1997.

Russell, Diana, E.H. "The Origin and Importance of the Term Femicide." *Diana E.H. Russell, Ph.D.*, Dec. 2011, https://www.dianarussell.com/origin_of_femicide.html.

—. "Femicide: The Power of a Name." *Diana E.H. Russell, Ph.D.*, 5, Oct. 2011, https://www.dianarussell.com/femicide_the_power_of_a_name.html.

Russell, Diana, E.H and Ellis, Candida. "Annihilation by Murder and by the Media: The Other Atlanta Femicides." *The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 160–162.

Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile: & Other Literary & Cultural Essays*. Granta Pub, 2000.

Salami, Minna. *Can Feminism be African? A Most Paradoxical Question*. William Collins, 2025.

Sanders, Rachel. "The Color of Fat: Racializing Obesity, Recuperating Whiteness, and Reproducing Injustice." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. Vol. 7, no. 2, 2019, pp. 287–304. *Taylor & Francis*, https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2017.1354039.

Schipper, Mineke. *Beyond the Boundaries: Text and Context in African Literature*. Ivan R. Dee, Inc, 1989.

Sethi, Bharati. "From a Maid to a Researcher: A Story of Privilege and Humility." *Canadian Social Work Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2012, pp. 87–100. *JSTOR*, http://jstor.org/stable/43486270.

Settles, Isis, H et al. "Scrutinized but not Recognized: (In)visibility and Hypervisibility Experiences of Faculty of Color." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 2018, pp. 1–13. *ELSEVIER*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.003.

Silva, Daniel, F. "Anti-Black Agencies: Maria Archer's Colonialist Feminism." *Portuguese Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, iss. 1, 2021, pp. 51–60. *Scholarworks*, https://doi.org/10.7275/kwc6-fe36.

Singer, Beverly, R. "American Indian women Killing: A Tewa Native Woman's Perspective." *The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 171–173.

Southhall Black Sisters. "Two Struggles: Challenging Male Violence and the Police." *The Politics of Woman Killing*, edited by Jill Radford & Diana E.H. Russell, Twayne P, 1992, pp. 312–316.

Spillers, Hortense, J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1987, pp. 65–81. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

Spivak, Gayatri, Chakravorty. "'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory." *A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Colombia University Press, 1994.

Steady, Chioma, Filomina. "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton Rushing, Howard University Press, 1987, 3–24.

Steffes-Halmer, Annabelle. "Arrest Warrant Issued for Author Tsitsi Dangarembga." *DW.COM*, *Deutsche Welle*, 27 June 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/arrest-warrant-issued-for-author-tsitsi-dangarembga/a-62275341.

Stoler, Ann, Laura. "Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth." *Race Critical Theories*, edited by Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell 2008, pp. 396–391.

Stotesbury, John, A. "Interviewing African Writers." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1998, pp. 28–37. *Academia*, https://www.academia.edu /70932952/Interviewing_African_Writers.

Strings, Sabrina. *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*. New York University Press, 2019.

Strobel, Margaret. "African women's History." *The History Teacher*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1982, pp. 509–522. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/493441.

Sudarkasa, Niara. "The Status of women in Indigenous African Societies." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton Rushing, Howard University Press, 1987, 25–42.

Suleri, Sara. "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 250–255.

Syed, Jawad and Ali Faiza. "The white Woman's Burden: From Colonial 'Civilization' to Third World 'Development'." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2011, pp. 349–365. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41300234.

Taiwo, Olufemi. "Feminism and Africa: Reflections on the Poverty of Theory." *African Women Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, edited by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Africa World Press Inc., 2003, pp. 45–66.

Talabi, Oluwadunni. O. "'Silence is Complacence'—Rewriting the Nigerian Woman: Female Autonomy and Emancipation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference/Everything Good will Come*." MA Thesis (unpublished), Westfaelische Wilhelms Universitaet, 2017.

Tate, Shirley. "Black Beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-racist Aesthetics." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, pp. 300–319. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870601143992.

Terbog-Penn, Rosalyn. "African Feminism: A Theoretical Approach to the History of women in the African Diaspora." *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton Rushing, Howard University Press, 1987, 43–64.

Thompson, Cheryl. "Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being." *Women's Studies*, vol. 38, no. 8, 2009, pp. 831–856. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870903238463.

Threadcraft, Shatema. "Making Black Femicide Visible." Philosophical Topics, vol. 49, no. 1, 2021, pp. 35–44. *JSTOR*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48652159.

Trudy. "Explanation of Misogynoir." *Gradient Lair, Pulire- Passion Themes*, 28 April 2014, https://www.gradientlair.com/post/84107309247/define-misogynoir-anti-Black-misogyny-moya-bailey-coined.

Tunca, Daria. "Redressing the "Narrative Balance": Subjection and Subjectivity in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street." *Afroeuropa*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267388532_Redressing_the_Narrative_Balance_Subjection_and_Subjectivity_in_Chika_Unigwe's_On_Black_Sisters'_Street.

Umezurike, Peter, Uchechukwu. "Sexuality and Subjectivity in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.*" *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, pp. 1–25. *AcademiaEdu*, https://www.academia.edu/19079059/Sexuality_and_subjectivity_in_Chika_Unigwe_s_On_Black_Sisters_Street.

Unigwe, Chika. *On Black Sisters' Street*. Vintage, 2010.

—. "An Interview with Chika Unigwe." Interview by Daria Tunca, Vicki Mortimer and Emmanuelle Del Calzo. *Wasafiri*, vol. 75, Iss. 3, 2013, pp. 54–49. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690055.2013.802439.

—. "Writing Africa in Belgium, Europe: A Conversation with Chika Unigwe. Interview by Elisabeth Bekers. *Indiana University Press*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2015, pp. 26–34. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafrilite.46.4.26.

—. "On Writing Transnational Migration in On Black Sisters' Street (2009) and Better Never Than Late (2019): An Interview with Chika Unigwe." Interview by Laura Barberan Reinares. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2020, pp. 411–423. *Routledge*, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1757202.

Vitackova, Martina. "Survival Strategies of Black Female Characters in Chika Unigwe's Novel On Black Sisters' Street." *TYDSKRIF VIR NEDERLANDS & AFRIKAANS*, 2019, pp. 51–64. *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349808278_Survival_strategies_of_black_female_characters_in_Chika_Unigwe's_novel_On_Black_Sisters'_Street.

White, Frances, E. *Dark Continent of our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*. Temple University Press, 2001.

Wilentz, Gay. "Toward a Diaspora Literature: Black women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States." *College English*, vol. 54, no. 4, 1992, pp. 385–405. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/377831.

Wright, Michelle, M. "Others-from-Without: Afro-German Subject Formation and the Challenge of a Counter-Discourse." *Callaloo*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2003, pp. 296–305. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3300854.

—. *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Young, Courtney. "Why TikTok Is Flooded with Controversial Videos about 'Pick Me Girls.'" *Bustle*, 5 May 2022, https://www.bustle.com/life/what-is -a-pick-me-girl-definition-traits.

Young, Lola. "What is Black British Feminism." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 11, no. 1–2, 2000, pp. 45–60, *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.108 0/09574040050051415.

Yuval-Davis, Nira and Anthias Flora, editors. *Woman-Nation-State*. St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender & Nation*. Sage Pub., 1997.