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 subjectivity 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—postcolonial 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 disenfranchisement.

Using Butler's work on psychic subjection, I argue that the hegemonic social 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 system, I argue that these signifying practices have caused conceptual changes) to what might have been Black women's subjectivity. I argue that a certain privilege 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 under 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 subjects, ensuring our compliance and participation in the terms of our discursive production. Complementarily, I aim to answer these questions: What distinctive structures of power and oppression do Black women writers identify and unmask in their texts? How are Black female characters constructed in dominant 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 characters' development? What structures of oppression are spotlighted when stories are written to reflect the struggles of Black female characters? What affective aesthetics are used in the texts to evoke Black women's lived and felt experience 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 monograph, 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 intersectional 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.