

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, Southall 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 Lagos, 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 fiancée 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 undocumented 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 disenfranchising. 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 rehearsed story of victimhood and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' confirmation of asylum rejection, foretells the lack of state protection and agency Black trafficked 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 "undesirable" 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 socio-cultural 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 heteropatriarchy (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—Chipso, 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 sacrosanctity 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 organizing principles employed by the Mugabe regime in a freshly post-independent 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 under the debilitating structure of anti-Black racial ideologies. It is under this shadow of extreme poverty, destitution, repressive governance, failed leadership, 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 pervasive hunger, Darling and her friends are nevertheless 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 contractor 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 failure, 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 habitually 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 postcolonial 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. However, I contend that this expectation would pass as ironic due to the backdrop of the adopted ethnocentric patriarchal orientation of nationalism, which depends 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 subjected to gendered violence, even as they use their mutilated bodies to defend the same men from state brutality vis-a-vis patriarchal articulations of nationhood. 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 Darling 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 stylistic 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 apology 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 child-like 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, masas cum evanhu imi? Liyahlanya you think this expensive 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 buffoons 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 people 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 commences, the white NGO workers immediately start taking pictures of the children and their parents. Circling back to Darling and her fellow dwellers of Paradise, they feel humiliated, embarrassed, and disenfranchised by this aspect of the NGO's conduct in their space and relationship to their bodies but feel powerless 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. Chipu 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 object 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 humanitarian narratives and the African children's expression of boundaries mean nothing 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 *Khayelitsha*, 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, Chipó'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 post-colonial 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 post-colonial 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 post-colonial 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 in *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 forewarns 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 consciousness that she would stand a better chance of getting the job as long as “she presented herself as an African in need” (Adichie 240). Her rhetorical question before 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 altruistic industry.

To end this chapter, I return to my argument that contemporary organizing 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, narrating 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, capitalism, and patriarchy that the novels powerfully explore.