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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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