3. Mobilizing History and Social Positionalities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3 Black Women, Visible Histories, and Gendered Trajectories

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3.3 Postcolonial Modernity, Class Mobilizations, and Agency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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