

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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