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Transcending Hegemonic Phallic-Culture and Imaginaries: Afropolitan Feminism and Relocation as an Emancipatory Metaphor

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Abstract

The representation of the struggles of contemporary African women from low-income/middle-class families, and their attempt at breaking free from the hold of such struggles have not gained much attention in the criticism of recent African novels. To bridge this research gap, this study interrogates Helon Habila's Travellers; NoViolet Bulawayo's We Need New Names; and Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah. It underscores the experiences of Darling, Ifemelu, and Mary, as existential struggles which allegorize real-life challenges of low-income/middle-class contemporary African women, and their attempt to break free from the bounds of such challenges aggravated by a hegemonic phallic culture and imaginaries. Adopting a qualitative content-based analytic method and a conceptual framework anchored on the conflated term Afropolitan-feminism; the study demonstrates how the characters' dissatisfaction with patriarchal exertions and their local geography animated by limited existential opportunities spurred their desire to relocate outside Africa. Importantly, their relocation constitutes a signature of action which could be read as an emancipatory metaphor for transcending those hegemonic structures, norms, worldviews, and imaginaries which militate against twenty-first-century African women's quest for agency.

Keywords: Afropolitan-feminism, hegemonic phallic-culture; emancipatory metaphor, African women

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Introduction

21st-century African women are encumbered by several existential struggles. These struggles crystalize as the denial of their capacity for intentionality and agency, the absence of female social visibility and full economic and political inclusion. This is enabled by an African worldview which places a premium on how and what should be the bounds for female social involvements and roles.

The contemporary social invisibility, economic and political exclusion of women is not recent in Africa; it is as old as African

anthropology. Early post-colonial written African literature across genres is replete with examples and narrative constructions on such worldview. For instance, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Aye Kwei Armah's *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Okot' p'Bitek's *Songs of Lawino* and Wole Soyinka's *Lion and the Jewel* fictionalize the social invisibility, economic and political exclusion of women in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa. In those works, African women are at best represented as humans living in the shadows of men.

In the aforementioned literature, the ethnophilosophical framing of African women is imagined as passive and subservient beings such that an African woman who demonstrates those features is labeled "Nneoma", an Igbo semantic idiom which could be rendered in English as a "good woman". This image of a "good woman" refers to:

> *… that woman who suffers the effect of oppression, and neglect; and who must maintain silence and passivity in order to remain good. Silence and passivity are two principal features of the good woman.* (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 3)

These "good women" are care-takers of the kitchen, or the "other-room", a metaphorical space where African men explore and make use of African women as sexual objects, or for their vagina, ovarian capital and as a therapy to exorcise male libidinal desires and the manufacturing of babies.

The rationale for such cultural perception of African women as dependents on African men during the pre-colonial/early post-colonial era is hinged on the false premise of protection. Yes, there were times when African women's economic value was strictly within the domestic space. In such pre-industrial moments, African men mostly go to war and encounter harsh tropical forests, wild animals, and elements in search of subsistence, while African women stay back to take care of the domestic space. This was an overtly shared responsibility for social harmony and balance.

However, African societies today have evolved, same with the desires and yearnings of African women, from the idyllic innocence which permits the passive and subservient status evident in earlier representations in African novels, to new forms of illuminated consciousness. This new consciousness is inspired by today's realities within education, economics, politics, culture, religion, and geography. These realities have encouraged African women to seek other avenues of survival, what can be described as "new conjugal models, living arrangements, and household structures" (Mbembe, 2021, p.191).

Thus, in their search for self-meaning making, contemporary African women are alert to the phallocentric worldview that privileges the African male and frowns at the African female from seeking economic opportunities like their male counter-part. Such a worldview also seeks to legislate the female body and imagination. It is these ideological structures of African female subjugation that this study describes as hegemonic phallic culture and imaginaries.

For clarity, such structures will be explored in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Helon Habila's *Travellers*, and Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* in order to demonstrate how contemporary African women transcend them within the framework of Afropolitan Feminism. Significantly, while the three novels have attracted critical attention, the gap in scholarship that this study seeks to fill is the dearth of research work on the novels from the perspective of Afropolitan feminism and the need to deepen the conversation on the present-day palavers confronting twenty-first-century African women.

The study demonstrates how the experiences and actions of Ifemelu, Mary and Darling could serve as a philosophy of praxis on how contemporary African women can break free from the exertions of culture, and patriarchy and assume the status of real African women, that is, women, "who in the face of tyranny will not remain silent" (Udumukwu, 2007, p.3).

Ifemelu, Darling and Mary's experiences and actions are a departure from the conventional trope of passivity and subservience which animate the imagination of African women in African novels. Instead, their characters represent an aesthetics or trope of resistance against the patriarchal order of things as imagined in earlier African novels.

Mention worthy is that passivity and subservience were once strategies of survival, however, they are no longer tenable as they have become antithetic to the process of the African woman's becoming in the twenty-first century. They make African women accomplices to the symbolic erection of phallic hegemony against their kind. They make it impossible to see the African woman outside the primordial African male gaze. They reduce African women to mere semiotic icons in service of the subconscious expectations of African males.

This aesthetics or trope of resistance is a sense of commitment which re-animates the literary production of contemporary African writers in their deployment of literature as a type of discourse to shape both private and public perception of African women. At the vanguard of this commitment are both male and female writers alike. They are saddled with the responsibility of raising human consciousness about how patriarchy continues to frustrate the African woman's desires of becoming.

Importantly, such commitment has a double semanticity of exposing the sad reality of African women today and achieving what Uko (2006) calls "transcending the margins" (p. 85). The category "margins" appropriated in this study refers to limitations, bounds, restrictions, and borders which manifest as hegemonic phallic culture and toxic capitalist imaginaries impeding the agency of 21st-century African women. Creating awareness of such issues is a type of social obligation "to righting the images against women" (Udumukwu, 2015, p. 230) and helping them enter into new semantic relations for themselves.

That commitment to "righting" the image of African women informs the aesthetic imagination of early postcolonial African female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aido, Ifeoma Okoye, Zainab Alkali and Nawal El Saadawi. These writers have assumed the role of social crusaders, battling female cultural exclusion, invisibility and colonization of the body when it was almost a crime for women to speak up in post-colonial Africa.

In their crusades, these female writers are alert to the various political, social, and economic ideologies of exclusion shaping conversations on how African women should be perceived. If possible, they seek to demolish them. In debunking such, their thesis is that the African woman's humanity is not different from her male counterpart. And, while she may not be without her flaws, her body is not a territory to be conquered. Instead, she should be accepted as a respected member of the African community whose contributions to social balance and equilibrium cannot be over-emphasized. Importantly, she is capable of holding her own and she is not a property of a male even in the context of marriage as the African culture had portrayed through the transaction of bride price payment (Nwapa, 2007, p.528). Hence, the African worldview on male/female relation is asymmetrically skewed to favor the male with the monopoly of space, power and narrative.

African writers like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aido, Ifeoma Okoye, Zainab Alkali, and Nawal El Saadawi were driven by a search for African modernity where the social, economic and cultural importance of women are recognized and accepted side by side with men. This is crucial because allowing a patriarchal conversation to thrive unchallenged will define to a large extent, the politics of the African woman's future and who is allowed to have a voice in it.

The foregoing defined the thrusts for studies in African women's literature, particularly for their literary kinfolks in contemporary African literary space such as Chimamanda Adichie, Chika Unigwe, and Lola Shoneyin, who have extended the frontiers of the conversations on the African female imagination through emerging thematic

concerns such as female migration to the diaspora in search of a better life elsewhere, as can be seen in novels like Adichie's *Americanah*, the issue of LGBT, sexuality and the conflict they present in African society as evident in Helon Habila's *Travellers*, the theme of breaking the silence on the subject of rape and girl child abuse, and female dissatisfaction within the present economic state of Africa captured in Noviolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.

Sadly, the theorizing of contemporary African women's experience is handicapped and unable to fully deepen the conversation and insight on present-day palavers confronting the African woman. This is in terms of theoretical scope in African women's studies. It creates an existing gap and a need for a fresh perspective. The seed for a fresh perspective or conceptual model to explain the 21st-century African woman's experiences were sown and began to germinate when Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) called for new theorizing of African feminism to offer more focused attention to the new challenges of African women to enable African women to talk about themselves within their lenses (p. 208).

Ogundipe-Leslie's call came some years after 1985, when Chikwenye Ogunyemi proposed African womanism, and the failure of this African womanism to address the unique set of challenges confronting contemporary African women whether in Africa or the New African Diaspora. This study experiments with the fusion of feminism and the gains of Afropolitanism (Afropolitan-feminism) to explore 21st-century African women's existentialities.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this is qualitative. The research design is content analysis and the novels analyzed were selected based on purposive sampling with insights drawn from the conflated term, Afropolitan-feminism as a conceptual framework. Its scope is limited to the study of the experiences and actions of specific female characters in Helon Habila's *Travellers*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (a major canon in Afropolitan literature).

As a concept, Afropolitan feminism is a neological formation that combines some of the gains of Afropolitanism and feminism. Of the two terms, Afropolitanism is the more recent term, whereas, feminism is an omnibus term which has existed before post-colonial Africa. Afropolitanism was first proposed by Taiye Selasi (2005) in a blog post in Lip Magazine titled —*Bye Bye Barbar*. It is a vocabulary that allows Selasi to describe Africans as —not citizens of the world, but Africans of the world (n.p). Afropolitanism gained currency among academics in cultural and literary spaces when Achille Mbembe, the Cameroonian cultural theorist came up with specific views on it, first in 2007, another in an interview with Balakrishnan in 2016, and his most recent book in 2021.

Mbembe's position on Afropolitanism revolves around the idea that 21st-century African identity is a cumulative backdrop of events both global and local manifesting as multiplicities and pluralities. It is a conceptual framework which captures —a way—the many ways—in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart (Mbembe and Balakrishnan, 2016, p. 29).

Such Africans are described as Africanized-cosmopolitans (Tiovanen,2021), or Africans with "polyphonic Africanness" (Anasiudu, 2022) whether they are in the continent or the New African Diaspora. They have an existence whose "social framework and spatial structure are now decentered, and which goes in the direction of both the past and the future "(Mbembe, 2021, p.5). Albeit, Afropolitanism is still generic in practice. Specific concerns such as gender culture politics have not received much critical attention in its conversation.

Feminism or "Femina" in Latin means woman (Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007, p.547). It is a movement in a search for justice for women globally, where politics and ideology collapse and merge (Nnolim, 2009, p. 134). Feminists privilege female emancipation by providing an understanding of gender as a form of power in

its gendered form (MacKinnon, 1989). African feminist strands include STIWANISM (see Ogundipe-Leslie, 2007), Womanism by Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Snail Sense Feminism by Akachi Ezeigbo. Okpara (2013) quoting Chidi Maduka notes that all "African feminism can be subsumed under the concept of womanism" (p. 64).

Sadly, African feminism in its present state has failed to capture the transnational experiences and global imaginaries of African women as it is still yoked to the local geo-aesthetics. Hence as a way of offering a new trajectory to it, this study combines the gains of Afropolitanism and African feminism. The setback with Afropolitanism or feminism as separate conceptual frames is the epistemological limitation each brings to the conversation on 21st-century African woman experiences and an absence of new ways for understanding them. A fusion of both terms into Afropolitan-feminism conceptually charts new semantic spaces and dialogue for broader synergetic analysis. The rationale for this fusion is predicated on the need to explore a combinatory concept which can explain the ways the African society composes and invents itself in lived experiences and creative performances in the context of the local and global.

There is no generally agreed term or a clear definition for what constitutes Afropolitan feminism among scholars. Tetteh-Batsa, (2018) argues that Afropolitan feminism is a theoretical framework for distinguishing Afropolitan feminist literature and narrative tradition undeniably crucial to an emergent discipline interested in accounting for, as other disciplines have, Black women who upstage systemic arrangements historically tailored to exclude them.

> *[...] Afropolitan feminism provides opportunities for re-framing intersectional feminism in the way the former accounts for African female standpoints and experiences otherwise subsumed under white and/or American mediated discussions of race, class, and gender.* (Tetteh-Batsa, 2018, p. vi)

My take is that Afropolitan-feminism is an anti-essentialist and deconstructive critical approach which inserts a female or gendered voice into Afropolitan discourse in response to the need for a fresh perspective on African feminism and Afropolitan discourses. It deepens the conversations which seek to understand the Afropolitan woman better. By the Afropolitan woman, we mean any woman with an African root, who identifies with this root, even though she has other cultural belonging and bond with which she is also affiliated to. Such women are not limited by melanin pigment, geographical location, or language. They can be white, or black their identity has what Ede (2018) calls "—rhizomatic existence, urbanity and expansive worldliness" (p.37). Afropolitan feminism shares ties with other sub-typologies of African feminism such as womanism, accommodationist, reactionary/middle of the roaders, and gynandrists (Nnolim, 2009, 137-138) or Akachi Ezeigbo's snail sense feminism by its focus on African women, their plight and how to dismantle every barrier against their agency. It differs in terms of its emphasis on the consequence of the fusion of local and global experiences of African women.

Empirical Review

In 2013, NoViolet Bulawayo attracted the attention of the global literary community with her novel, *We Need New Names* (2013) (hereafter known as *WNNN)*. In an interview with Hartselle (2015), Bulawayo explained that *WNNN* highlights how Africans coped with the issue of food, weather, alienation from the homeland, language barrier, and melancholy (p. 33).

The thematic concerns portrayed in *WNNN* include the experiences of African migrant in a bid to run away from a crisis in Africa (Zimbabwe) and runs into another crisis outside Africa (USA)(Chidora and Ngara, 2019, p. 85); the negative stereotype in Eurocentric discourse of Africa in literature and media (Brooks, 2018, p. 21); the representation of Africans in the diaspora as social abject (Rodríguez, 019, p.127).

Other concerns are the carnivalesque conditions in post-colonial Africa (Ngoshi,

2016, p. 53); a call for moral revival (Caraivan, 2019, p. 62); the linguistic and textual forms of expression in discourse (Adami, 2016, p. 11); and the precarious belongings of Africans in a world violently "polarized into West and East" (Anastasijevic *et al*., 2019, p.2).

On the other hand, the critical responses to Helon Habila's *Travellers* border on thematic thrusts such as migration (Englund, 2020); migritudial temper (Olaniyan, 2020, p. 68); search for refuge elsewhere (Unuajohwofia, and Babogha, 2021, p. 34) and the life of African migrants as tramps and wanderers (Shey, 2021, p.2).

Similarly, Ramsey-Kurz (2020) explored the issue of precarity in transit among African migrants in diasporic spaces (p.168) with particular focus on how the author engages narration as a tool to help humans empathize with or understand the forceful displacement of persons from some countries in Africa and the precarious lives they live in transit in other to find belonging in other spaces.

Travellers also capture the nature of migration and exilic experiences of the characters in the novel and also how the characters are given a chance to be seen for who they are, their lives, identity as migrants as fathers, and wives, with a distinct life, and as persons. Through the experiences of the characters, "readers are allowed to explore new angles as they experience the world through the eyes of a refugee or migrant, which is a perspective completely unfamiliar to many" (Hager, 2020, p.2).

The thematic concerns of Adichie's *Americanah* revolve around; displacement and racial discrimination (Rahiminezhad, 2015, p.536); love, desire, and romance (Leetsch, 2017, p. 1); the identity of Africans as translated beings (Murphy, 2017, p.93); a travelogue which captures the transcultural encounters of Africans in the diaspora (Uka, 2017,p. 387); liminality and bicultural identity (Amonyeze, 2017, p. 3); the androcentric social, cultural, and political structures of African society (Yasmin, 2020, p.5569); and a post-colonial coming-of-age narrative evident in the narrative order which seeks to rewrite the stereotypical plot of romance and the male-female double Bildungsroman (Villanova, 2018, p. 85).

The gap in scholarship in the study of these novels is the dearth of research work on the novels from the perspective of Afropolitan feminism and how the transcontinental mobility of the African woman constitutes a search for new horizons and agency. This is the gap this study seeks to fill and also make contributions to extant scholarship on Afropolitanism, feminism and African Women Literature.

Transcending Hegemonic Phallic-Culture and Imaginaries: Afropolitan Feminism and Relocation as an Emancipatory Metaphor

Nwapa (2007) raised a pertinent concern on "how [...] African literary texts project women?" (p.527). Immanent in such concern is the need to intentionally write the African woman into thoughts, discourse and imaginations differently from that which already exists. At another level, such erotema seeks to demolish extant photographs of the African woman as a subhuman and a canvass upon which institutional, socio-economic and cultural forces interpellated and could make negative inscriptions. Such question serves as a purveyor of robust conversation and counter-discursive strategy against forms of interpellation and a cultural inscription which render African women powerless; barred from social participation in spheres of power and socio-economic agency.

Nwapa's concern could be construed as a protest and call to interrogate systemic arrangements whether artistic, social, religious, economic or historically tailored to exclude women from every sphere of power within Africa's literary imagination. Uko (2017) succinctly captures some of the essentialist imageries of the African woman in different epochs -tailored to exclude them during the pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary eras in her inaugural lecture as shown below:

> *the woman has to fit into the specified societal or familial category, and that*

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> *identification determines her role. The major common features among these categories of femininity are subservience, docility, acquiescence, (sometimes) invisibility, muteness, etc. Essentially, these categories of femininity are always present during the very (sic) epoch of human development, especially in Africa.* (p.11)

Uko's view on how women are essentialized is similar to what Udumukwu (2015) calls "abstractions created by men" (p.273). It is symptomatic of phallocentrism (Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2018, pp.5-18), and makes it difficult for African women to reconstitute their agency (Umezurike, 2015, p. 152) at several fronts whether it is economic, cultural, institutional, or political.

The negative essentialism of women is normalized by an elaborate regime of patriarchal rules, social codes and taboos causing a fissure due to cultural, economic and social exertions. The exertions disempower African women and also mount pressure upon their shoulders, thereby constituting a type of bounds. Thus, contemporary African women seek to break free from such bounds as a basic instinct for survival.

It is a basic human instinct for the African woman to seek freedom, survive or break free from bondage. Worthy of note also is that African women are not alone in this. It is a common trait of living organisms in terms of devising a strategy of survival when its immediate environment becomes a threat, destructive and prevents it from thriving. In such a situation, some organisms may hibernate, and some may relocate or migrate like birds, and fish in search of a favourable environment to thrive and develop. This is the same response that animates the three novels as the characters seek other spaces for survival.

In *We Need New Names* (2013), Bulawayo sheds light on those struggles such as economic, social and cultural hurdles before a young girl, Darling while in her local space Paradise and her attempt to break free from such hurdles.

The hypothetical space Paradise is an allegory of Zimbabwe in a state of chaos and anomie. It is described as a "kaka" environment. "Kaka" is a recurring lexical formation in the novel. It is the descriptive name for Paradise in terms of a shantytown. The name also signifies a bad, chaotic, and nonfunctional place with the semblance of a slum and a gruesome ghetto. Darling, her parent and community members relocate to Paradise, when their first place of abode was demolished by the government.

In this new place where they are relocated, the novel underscores that parental neglect is rife as children roam the streets of Paradise with reckless abandon. Six words describe the people's attitude towards Paradise: "leave, abandon, flee, run —anything, Escape." (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 245). The poverty, sickness, juvenile delinquency, riot, the religious hypocrisy of Prophet Revelation Bitchington Mboro (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 20), coupled with a system that projects men as the sole breadwinner of the home while women stay back at home, do not fit into Darlings dreams and imagination as she already has a negative view of men as exploiters of women based on the rape of Chipo, (a girl barely twelve years old) by his grandfather.

The scenario painted in *We Need New Names*, is bleak for women like Darling because it creates obstacles to her beautiful dreams. It would require that a new algorithm for socioeconomic standing for women in Paradise emerges. This should reflect the changing economic and social patterns today, but, this is almost difficult. In Paradise, the women stay back home while the men go off, in search of subsistence as in pre-industrial society. Such an economic system stifles every seed of greatness within Darling, our protagonist. One of the possible suggestions Bulawayo tacitly offers through her representation is a reconfiguration of the economic system in Africa, such that African women in the present, should be participants/social actors and not invisible or observers. Bulawayo's representation of the male characters such as Prophet Revelation Bitchington Mboro, and Chipo's grandfather suggestions that the phallic hegemonic culture and toxic economic imaginaries in Paradise

complicate the situation of their women. It shows society at the mercy of global economic forces, which creates a periphery like Paradise and a pseudo-centre like South Africa where the men of Paradise run to, to work at the goldmine, made for western markets.

It must be understood in the context that the African economic system was not originally a toxic capitalist system, but a syncretic system embracing, socialism, egalitarianism, communalism and quasi-capitalist exchange. Precolonial African societies have their positive parts, in that their economic system protected certain African women's enterprises as some kind of trade and jobs were designated for women. This was an economic system and model which considers women as a member of society, depending on their strength, and functions at that time. But this has been disrupted by Euro-western incursion, through the introduction of western capitalist models into Africa what I call incompatible modernity and toxic economic imaginaries.

It is such an idea of modernity that informed the destruction of the first abode of Darling's parents before their relocation to Paradise. Today, such toxic economic imaginaries are further facilitated by an interplanetary economic convergence where Africa is a supplier of cheap labour for advanced western industries whereas, in Africa, economic recession, currency devaluation, and unemployment are at an epidemic level as evident in Paradise.

This forced their women to evolve new modes of socioeconomic existence for survival. Some of the girls in Paradise resort to sex for money with Chinese construction workers (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 45) and for those who left Paradise for the USA such as Mzipho, Primrose, Sicelokuhle and MMaidenwhom both had sex "with that fat black pig Banyile Khosa from the passport office. Girls flat on their backs, Banyile between their legs, America on their minds" (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 240). On the other hand, the occasional handout from NGO people in terms of cloth, food and toys in the guise of a charity with an intent of capturing the hungry faces of the poor in Africa for western media houses, gave a little piece of life to Paradise, apart from that, Paradise is a wasteland.

The condition of Paradise is deplorable. It holds few promises for Darling. Money has no value anymore in Paradise, all the teachers have left the schools in Paradise to teach in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Darling has also experienced a fair share of hunger, the traumatic experiences which come with the absence of a father, and a mother who engages in adultery. Considering the limited options available for Darling, America, where Aunty Fostalina stays, is her last resort and, I will go to America becomes a reoccurring statement from Darling, which speaks of the yearning for new horizons.

While the location of Darling's new horizon is in the USA, her desire for travelling is to leave behind the "Kaka" place called Paradise, to find meaning and become a better-fulfilled person. When she arrives in America, going back home is no longer an option even though her visa expires and it was illegal for her and others in her condition to continue to stay (Bulawayo, 2013, p.242). For Darling, to go back home is synonymous with going back to a stifled agency. The goal of her relocation is to secure her safety for survival. Her decisions demonstrate her desire for economic, social, and political freedom and from systems tailored to exclude her from making sense of her life.

Darling's relocation offers her more than one root of belonging and a rhizomatic view of life and existence. And she adapts quickly to the American culture space. Her exposure to more than one cultural topography offers Darling a type of African-Identity that is multicultural and Afropolitan. She has seen the world from more than one viewpoint. It changes her sense of self from an impoverished African lady to one who is empowered economically.

Another literary example demonstrated in this study which shows how an African woman un-bounds through relocation is evident in Helon Habila's *Travellers*. The novel captures the evolution in the constitution of the present African cultural space and social imagination where the global and the local

interact more than ever, fostering cultural syncretism. This interaction affects Africa greatly, as new fashion sense, new types of jobs and values emerge. This creates a lot of conflict between the old generation and generation Z. For the African girl child, the inability to reconcile traditional values with present realities is seen as rebellious. This is what plays out in the life of Mary Chinomba who also doubles as Mark in Helon Habila's *Travellers*.

Mary's idea of a 21st-century lifestyle in terms of fashion and career is influenced by global popular culture. This is a phenomenon that has continued to change the cultural landscape of Africa since the quarter of the twentieth century. This global culture informs the taste, appetite fashion sense and normative values of many young Africans and their sexuality. The friction this causes is seen in terms of Mary's rebellion against her father and her father's inability to understand why she acts the way she does. The outcome of global popular culture on young African girls is that it reduces the hold of cultural conservatism and ignites the embrace of other ways of life beyond Africa.

Mary is the middle child of three children. Mary's father is the pastor of a Pentecostal church in Lilongwe the capital of Malawi (Habila, 2019, p. 48). Mary is creative, talented, ambitious and adventurous and wants to explore the world. The first instance a reader gets to see the name Mary Chinomba certainly triggers a surprise. This is because of the deliberate authorial reticence weaved into the narrative by the author, in terms of withholding some vital information about the character Mary — whose alias is Mark.

The short, passionate life of Mary is captured briefly in the *Travellers*. Her actions were a small part of the larger plot structure of the novel and extant critical studies on *Travellers* have ignored it. Her life is characterized by great velocity, community engagement, activism and protest, which makes Mary's role as a social mobiliser quite focal. Her identity is complicated by circumstances within her family background, her self-exile to Germany and above all Mary's gender.

Mary's relocation to Germany underscores her search for freedom because of her need for creative expression and sexuality. As a lesbian, she wants to be away from a conservative culture, a strict religious environment and an overbearing father. While in Africa, Mary bears her original name, but in Germany, she is known by her alias Mark. Mary thus represents the outcome of changing cultural composition, influence and contrast between Africa and beyond.

To please her father, Mary obliges to theatrical performances in her father's local church but she is not permitted to practice dramaturgy outside the church. This caused great strife within her family since her father holds an extreme religious worldview. And this in no small way informs his strict adherence to a version of Christian piety which includes that a Christian can only be an actor in church but not outside the church. Things continued this way until Mary decides to study Theatre Art at the university which his father objected to. It is the support she gets from her mother that helped her carry on with her dream.

Mary's father is of the view that Theatre Art is ungodly, "it would bring disgrace to the church. He said it was too worldly" (Habila, 2019, p.49). Mary's father represents religious adherence who are unwilling to shift their perception or welcome other suggestion except theirs. He also symbolically stands for the cultural and social machinery of masculine power which seeks to constrain the imaginaries of the girl child.

To a large extent, Mary's father's view stifles Mary's sense of individuality, personhood, and agency. It is a major source of conflict between what Mary wants to become and Mary's father's expectations and desire for her. If Mary had stayed back in Africa, it would not have been possible for her to explore the fullness of her talent and gifts as a talented filmmaker, a film student whose short movie wins for her an award in Berlin. Her relocation to Germany offers her an opportunity for social engagement as one of the members of the "alternative" (Habila, 2019, p.15) a group committed to anti-establishment protests in Berlin (p.15).

Another important aspect of Mary which may have instigated the conflict between her and her father is Mary's fashion sense as a cross-dresser (Habila, 2019, p.67). This raises a lot of questions concerning Mary's physiology, sexuality and acceptance of self. Is Mary gay? How would it be that a preacher's daughter dresses in drag, clothing of the opposite sex or whatever attire that is characteristics of a given gender or sex, worn by a member of the other sex, such as women's clothing worn by men and men's clothing worn by women (Habila, 2019, p. 67)? Mary's sexualities and fashion tastes, values and suggestions speak of a major culture and ethical re-compositioning in Africa.

> *Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, this has emerged as the gradual appearance of a sphere of private life drawing its symbols from global culture. No space is more characteristic of this transnationalization than the domains of fashion, music, sport, cinema, fashion, and care for the body in general. New imaginaries of the self are connected to all this, as well as to sexuality.* (Mbembe, 2021, p.191)

Mary's sexual orientation as a lesbian contradicts her father's belief as a preacher, a pastor, a Christian, and the worldview held by the majority in Africa. To Mary's father, her act is a type of *immoderate.* Mary's continuous stay with her father in Malawi pitches her against her father. Thus, in a bid to find new meaning and expression of self, Mary desires to relocate. It is in Germany that Mary comes to terms with herself and existentially defines herself in the light of the idea of sexuality she has concerning herself. Mary gets a lover and a girlfriend called Lorelle (Habila, 2019, 68), while enrolled in a PhD, programme as a film student, while she works as a freelance activist.

Relocation for Mary Chinomba has more than one semantic logic. First, it is suggestive of her physical journey from Africa to Europe. On another level, it is suggestive of her protest, an uprising, her way of speaking up against "her" father's worldview in Malawi, and by extension against too much money in too few hands, against millions exploited in sweatshops in Asia, against wars in Africa, against hunger and disease, against global warming, despicable politicians and against refugee's crisis (Habila, 2019, p.20). lastly, it is a way of survival, an emancipatory metaphorical schema for seeking freedom from the bounds of cultural technologies in place to administrate her mind and talent.

On the other hand**,** *Americanah* (2013) tells the experiences of Ifemelu, a young, intelligent African woman from Nigeria and her quest for a better life despite the enormous challenges which confront her. Ifemelu is an undergraduate student of Geology at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. She symbolizes the hope of young Nigerian girls who believe that a university education is a passport to a better life. And this desperation to acquire such education and the class status it accords owners of a university degree are enough motivation for many Nigerians who are willing to go through the hurdles of SAT examination and the delay of getting an American visa.

Ifemelu's experiences in Nigeria index the mindset of millions of Nigerian youths who want to leave the country due to Nigeria's socio-economic and political situation. The situation stifles Ifemelu's honest effort to make meaning of her life. This is evident in the constant industrial strike action embarked upon by university lecturers because the military government in power refuses to pay their salaries for months as explained by Obinze's mother, "I understand the students' grievance, but we are not the enemy. The military is the enemy. They have not paid our salary in months. How can we teach if we cannot eat?" (Adichie, 2013, p.91).

The strikes are now very common. Many students are planning to leave Nigeria for other countries as the government men whose children are schooling abroad are reluctant to holistically attend to the issue (Adichie, 2013, p.98). Also, due to the economic downturn. Corporate downsizing affects her family greatly when her father receives a sack letter. These all complicate her sense of assurance that Nigeria, as the country has a good future for her as the series of events, reflects a constant depiction of uncertainties. The foregoing instigates Ifemelu's desire to explore

other options for her academic life and future, especially outside the country of Nigeria. Her desire for education outside Nigeria is given impetus by her group of friends who have been to America and Europe such as Bisi. Ginika has been to America, and Kayode has been to Switzerland (p. 65).

Another issue that bothers Ifemelu is her gender. She observes that being a woman in Nigeria comes with its challenges; in a society that projects females as subservient, second fiddle and commodities to be owned. This is captured in the relationship between the General and Aunty Uju which she observes from a close distance. Aunty Uju never minds her status as the General's mistress and Uju's mother is not bothered about it either. Uju's mother did not express her displeasure, as long as the benefit that accrues to the family never ceases in terms of money and food items. Another incident that troubles Ifemelu and reveals how men treat women is the scene where Obinze's mother is slapped by another professor, just because she publicly exposed the professor's misuse of funds, thus the professor slaps her "as he could not take a woman talking to him like that (Adichie, 2013, p. 59).

Ifemelu becomes frustrated and helpless. The education and economic environment in Nigeria are very toxic for her self-growth. She complains to Aunty Uju, telling her that there is another nationwide industrial strike action embarked on by university lecturers. Aunty Uju falls into a lamentation, "What is this kind of nonsense?" Aunty Uju said. "Honestly, you should come and study here, I am sure you can easily get a scholarship." (99). But it is not Ifemelu alone that is frustrated with the system. Many young people apart from Ifemelu also nurse the dream and pursuit of America…there are other "thousands of people all bristling with their American ambitions" (Adichie, 2013, p.99).

So, it is a moment of joy for Ifemelu when Aunty Uju tells her that there is an acceptance letter and a scholarship offer for her to a university outside the country (Adichie, 2013, p.100). It is through this scholarship that Ifemelu leaves Nigeria for the USA. Worthy of note is that Ifemelu's migration is a premeditated effort intended to offer her better economic, political and educational opportunities in America. As Ifemelu leaves for America, Obinze's mother notes that Nigeria is chasing her best resources" (Adichie, 2013, p.100).

Relocation offered Ifemelu access to a new academic beginning, an Ivy League education, and cosmopolitan citizenship as an Afropolitan female in a liberal cosmopolitan space. Her leaving Nigeria demonstrates their desire and search for new horizons. Coming to America, Ifemelu encounters several levels of challenges in terms of acculturating into the new environment, and the otherness it entails. However, she gradually begins to assimilate into American culture. For one thing, Ifemelu's middle-class background helps in providing a platform for her to assimilate into the liberal, cosmopolitan American lifestyle. A space where only cultural assimilation can help her fulfil her dreams.

When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, her worldview has so transformed that she is described as *Americanah*, a name for persons who have been to America. But, what may be overlooked in that word is its implications for Afropolitanism, especially for Ifemelu as a woman. It spells the fact that Ifemelu now has a multicultural sensibility, a "worldly-wiseness" and affinity beyond Africa. Importantly, her agency as a human being has also been empowered by her travels. As a way of concluding this part, what the foregoing shows are what this study calls Afropolitan-feminism a way of describing the Afro-diasporic female experience. This is to underscore how travelling or the troupe of mobility constitute a strategy twenty-first-century African women or Afropolitan women deploy to transcend or go against the negative essentialism and the exertions of patriarchy they experience in Africa.

One of the strategies of subverting the system and structures is through relocation elsewhere. Their relocation to Europe opens up a new vista to understanding their motivation and quest for new subjectivity, individual autonomy and translation into Afropolitans. This is explored through characters whose lives demonstrate the

Afropolitan female struggles and desires for a new horizon. Importantly, a common feature of the female characters is that they left their homeland to seek a better sense of agency in new territories because of the exertions upon their lives imposed upon them by patriarchy and the economic system. Importantly, their lives evolved into multicultural beings, with a broad view of life and a cosmopolitan existence.

Conclusion

This study shows that Darling, Mary and Ifemelu are symbolic representations and their experiences speak to the plight of contemporary African women who are dissatisfied with their local geography because of the limited existential opportunities it offers, hence, the search for new horizons. The solution the novelists offer is captured as relocation, an act which indexically becomes an emancipatory metaphor for the characters. The study opens up a new vista for understanding how relocation could offer African women economic, educational, and relational emancipation. The study concludes from the findings that the existential challenges of African women from the past to the present have not changed. It only evolved in forms. Not only that, apart from the fact that relocation as captured in the novel serves as an emancipatory metaphor, it could be read as a form of symbolic resistance against the cultural, economic and social barriers which stifle the twenty-first-century African woman's agency.

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